

**Worldview and Religion:**

**Evangelizing and Discipling People  
For Transformation  
At the Level of Worldview**

**Understanding Worldview and Religion**  
**Part 1: Understanding Worldview and Religion**  
**Lesson One**

Welcome to this very important subject. It is a great joy to be serving God together with you as brothers and sisters in Christ. God has called you and me to proclaim the Good News of His Son to all those who have not yet heard of His wonderful salvation of forgiveness from sins and eternal life with Him. What an honor and a privilege He has granted us!

Today we will begin to study a very important subject that will strengthen you in your service for the Lord Jesus Christ. The name of this course is *Understanding Worldview and Religion*. In this first section of the course, we will gain a broad understanding of worldview arising from the experience of missionaries in various tribes and learn how to minister to people at the level of their world view. In the second section of the course, the last four lessons, we will look at specific types of worldview and how worldview affects how we live out our lives as people and as Christians.

First, let's get an understanding of what a worldview is. Worldview refers to the way a person looks at the world and at life. Let me give you an illustration that will help you understand worldview. This story happened on the island nation of Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea is an island north of Australia that is populated with many different people groups who speak many different languages. There are actually over 800 different languages spoken in Papua New Guinea! The island has a very diverse landscape ranging from high and rugged mountains to thick, dense jungles. Just like so many places around the world, many people who live there have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many have only had a limited contact with the outside world. Many of the people groups live in remote jungle locations. This story comes from one of those locations.

In a small village, deep in the jungle and just off a small river, the Bisorio people lived for hundreds of years. They were a dark-skinned people and the men and women alike wore only grass skirts tied with jungle vine. They lived so deeply in the interior of the jungle that they were virtually cut off from outside world. Never before had they seen matches. Instead, they would rub bamboo sticks vigorously together to get a spark to create a fire for warmth and for cooking. Their everyday lives depended on what they could hunt for food or what their gardens might produce. If they did not kill a wild pig, a parrot or a crocodile that would nourish them for days, they would hope the spirits would look upon their gardens with favor and give them large harvests of sweet potatoes, taro root, bananas or sugar cane. The Bisorios lived in small hamlets among themselves and often warred with neighboring tribes. Disease threatened their health at every turn. Hunger was prominent. Never before had they had contact with the gospel of Christ. Their way of life was truly miserable and without hope.

But then, in the sovereignty of God, a couple from Canada named George and Harriett desired to go into the jungle to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them. Like you hope to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people who have never heard it, George and Harriett wanted to tell the Bisorios about Christ because they had never heard about Him either. So George and Harriett took a small boat up the steamy river and moved into the small village in the interior of the

jungle to live with the Bisorios. They made a small home out of trees from the jungle and began to live among the Bisorio people so they could learn their language and cultural customs and build relationships with them. The language of the Bisorio people was completely unknown by outsiders. So before they could tell them about God and His Son, Jesus, they first had to learn how to communicate with the Bisorios in a way they could understand. George and Harriett had to listen intensely and watch carefully as they tried to learn to communicate with them. It took several years of listening, interacting with the people, making mistakes and building relationships before George and Harriett knew the language and culture well enough to share the Gospel with the Bisorios in a way they could understand.

It was during this time of learning, before they had learned enough to share the Gospel with the Bisorios, that Bawame, a young Bisorio woman, was carried from the remote mountains into their jungle village. She was thin, pale and very, very weak. George and Harriett were very sad and concerned as they saw this woman so very sick. After talking with medical workers and praying, they began to care for her. They treated her with anti-malarial medicine and provided her with wholesome food and fresh water. They agreed with Bawame's family that she and a couple of close relatives should stay in George and Harriett's home so that they could provide her with the constant care she required during this critical time. Praise God, by God's healing hand she began to improve and George and Harriett were very hopeful and joyful that she would recover. They were very encouraged! *But then* one day, Bawame's uncle, Asebei, came and led her away into the jungle to offer sacrifices to the ancestors to affect her healing. He was very concerned for her health as well and so he wanted to take Bawame and help her. George and Harriett heard people in the village shouting to them, "They're taking Bawame! They're taking Bawame!" They ran down to the river's edge just in time to see the dugout canoes pulling away, one with Bawame in it. Though she had clearly begun to improve, she was still quite frail and required more care and medicine. George called out, pleading, "Please, Asebei, please don't take Bawame yet. Please, wait. Please, let us help." Asebei did not respond. He did not look back. He just kept paddling upriver. He took her away, deep into the jungle, to a little hamlet near his garden. In his small shelter, he made a space for Bawame to lie down. He tried to give her water and food and then would go to offer sacrifices to the ancestor spirits so that they would bring healing to Bawame. However, Bawame died shortly thereafter in a lonely, remote place. She died without ever responding to the Gospel of Christ.

### Underneath the Observable

What happened in this story? George and Harriett behaved in one way, while Asebei behaved in another. Both saw that Bawame was very sick. George and Harriett were very concerned about her. They prayed to God to heal her. They called the medical workers and gave her medicine. They gave her wholesome food and clean water. They had her and some of her family stay in their own home while Bawame healed. Asebei was also very concerned for Bawame's health. He removed Bawame from George and Harriett's house. He took her upriver away from the village and into the depths of the jungle. He made room for her to lie down in his hamlet. He tried to give her food and water. He offered sacrifices to his ancestors to heal her.

Notice that both George and Harriett and Asebei felt the same concern for Bawame's health and both wanted to care for her and make her better. But they each took very different actions to do

so. Why? It was because the way George and Harriett looked at life and reality was different than the way Asebei did. Their worldview, that is, what they each believed about reality greatly influenced how they acted. What people believe about reality really does matter. It affects the way they understand and relate to all the various things in life. And it really can be a matter of life and death. Underneath the outward, visible behaviors and emotions are what people believe about reality, that is, their worldview. It is very important to learn that worldview beliefs strongly influence people's behaviors.

When you move to a new culture to be a missionary, you are coming with your worldview and you are ministering to people who have a very different worldview. This will result in many difficulties in communicating the Gospel and establishing the church. You will have a hard time understanding why they do the things they do, unless you learn to understand their worldview which gives the reason behind their actions. They likewise may have problems understanding why you do what you do because they are seeing your actions and hearing your communication through their worldview.

### Worldviews Influence Every Aspect of Life

But before we go more in-depth into what worldview is and how it works, let's learn more about what the Bible says about the importance of worldviews. Every person has a worldview. A worldview strongly influences the way a person behaves. This worldview is the foundation for his life beliefs and actions.

Think of the foundation of a house. When a house is built, the builder starts by laying a foundation. The foundation is the very beginning of that house. The foundation will hold the house itself in place. It will determine how the rest of the house is built including where the walls go up, where the rooms will be divided and even how large the roof needs to be. The entire house is supported by the foundation. Just as the foundation supports the entire house, a person's worldview is the foundation to how they view all of life and how they behave. But how does a person know where to begin so they can have a strong worldview foundation? Just as a builder has a plan to build the foundation to a house, we as Christians have the Bible as our plan. God our Father, in His mercy, has told us His plan. He has revealed His thoughts to us in a way we can understand in His Word, the Bible. This is where we must start in order to clearly understand what our worldview ought to be.

Keep in mind as we look to the Bible for instruction that we are laying a strong foundation for how we should properly view all of life. This includes how we think about ourselves, how we relate with others and how we live every aspect of our lives. Our worldview does not just affect a few areas of life or even one or two main beliefs we might have. Rather, it affects all of life. Just as the foundation of the house supports all the rooms, our worldview foundation will support and strongly influence how we think and behave in every area of our lives. Let us now turn to God's Word to see what He says about worldviews and especially what should be the beginning basis for our worldview.

### God and His Word

The foundation for our worldview must begin with God himself. He alone is the ultimate and supreme authority in the universe. He alone can tell us what is true. He created the entire world and has a specific design for how He wants His creation to live. His desire for how we should live is not a mystery. In His mercy, God revealed His thoughts to us in several ways. He has told us in His Word, the Bible, how He wants us to live and think about reality. He has given us clear instruction about how to relate with others, how to minister and how to respond to trials in life. In order to have a true and proper worldview, we must submit to God's Word and follow the teachings He has given us.

Do you remember when the Lord Jesus was tempted by the Devil to disobey God in the wilderness? How did he respond to the Devil? The Lord Jesus responded to him by saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" Matthew 4:4. Jesus teaches us that we must live by God's Word. We must learn how to live and think about reality by listening to God's Word. Then we must submit to what He teaches us. As we listen to God's Word and do what He teaches us, we will develop a true, biblical worldview that brings glory to God. As a true and biblical worldview develops in our hearts and minds, we will be more effective ministers of the Gospel.

God has also spoken to us in history. He teaches us how He desires us to live through how He acts in history. From the beginning of time, God has been continuously interacting with humans on earth in order to teach us how He wants us to think and live. Can you think of ways that God acted in history? Consider, for example, how after God had finished creating the world, He lovingly interacted with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, He banished them from the Garden of Eden for their disobedience. By this act, God taught us that there are consequences for disobeying Him. This is just one example of how God acted in history to teach us how He wants us to live. God's Word says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope" Romans 15:4. So God has given us His story of the world in the Bible so that we can learn how to live our lives for His glory and have hope in Him.

God also teaches us through the life and words of His Son, Jesus Christ. We can learn the proper way to think and live by learning about what Jesus said and did in the Bible. God used all that Jesus said and did in His life on earth to teach us about Himself. As Jesus Himself said about how He lived His life for God the Father, "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" John 8:29.

Yes, God alone is the ultimate and supreme authority over all of life. We must submit to Him and look to Him for how we ought to live and think about life and reality. He teaches us through His Word, through His actions in history and through the very words and life of His Son, the Lord Jesus. We must look first to what God tells us in order to form a biblical worldview, living by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

### The Fear of the Lord

Through the various ways of teaching us, God also used a very wise man in the Bible to help teach us how to live and think properly. His name was Solomon. Solomon was the son of the greatest king of Israel, King David. David, Solomon's father, taught Solomon to live as God wanted him to live. After his father David died, Solomon succeeded him as king of Israel. One day, God told Solomon to ask him for anything he wanted. Solomon asked God for wisdom to rule his kingdom and to be a good king. God was very pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom rather than a long life or wealth. God gave Solomon the wisdom he asked for. He gave Solomon wisdom to rule his people as well as wisdom to live and think properly about life and reality. Solomon recorded many wise sayings. Those wise sayings were inspired by God. They are now part of the Bible, in the book of Proverbs.

Solomon knew that the wisdom he had was a gift from God. He knew that wisdom was not something he could gain on his own. He had to look to God and His Word to learn and understand how to live as God wanted him to live. One of the most important things God taught Solomon was that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" Proverbs 1:7. Solomon knew where knowledge and wisdom begin. They begin with the fear of the Lord. What does it mean to fear the Lord? To fear the Lord means to recognize Him as the ultimate authority over all of life and to do what he says.

Solomon's words of wisdom apply to us today. If we want to be wise and have a proper worldview, we must begin where Solomon did. We must fear the Lord so that we can better understand how He wants us to live and think about life and reality. We must recognize God as the ultimate authority over all of life and submit to the truth He teaches us in His Word.

Wisdom from God is very important in the Bible. God wants us to gain knowledge and wisdom so we know how to live our lives in a way that He desires. God used His Son, the Lord Jesus to teach us how to be wise and not foolish.

Let us consider the parable Jesus told about the wise man and the foolish man. He said, "Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great" Luke 6:46-49.

He told us this parable for a purpose. He wants us to understand that God does not want us to just hear His Word, but to truly obey it. God does not want us to be like the foolish man, but like the wise man who built his house on a solid foundation. He wants us to have a strong biblical worldview so that we can properly look at the world and live for Him honorably.

God wants us to be faithful and effective ministers of the Gospel. He also desires those whom we reach for Christ to have a solid foundation too so that they will be faithful and effective ministers themselves. Jesus teaches that as we truly listen to and obey God's Word by faith, we will come to a clear understanding of a biblical worldview, having a life and ministry that is strong in Him.

In contrast to the wise man, the foolish man does not have a strong foundation and does not listen to or obey God's Word. He does not have a biblical worldview and walks in darkness. The Scriptures say this about the fool: Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." The person who is a fool does not listen to God's words, but only to himself. His source for knowledge is himself and in him there is no wisdom.

So as you continue to prepare for serving God, be careful to build your house—that is, your ministry—like the wise man. Continue listening carefully to God's Word. By faith in God, continue doing what it says. Continue submitting to the authority of God's Word alone so that you grow in your understanding and develop a strong biblical worldview. This will be your solid foundation and your ministry will be strong and effective.

### How Worldviews Influence All of Life

We have already found out that a worldview is the way a person looks at the world and at life. Another way to describe a worldview is the eyeglasses through which a person sees the world and life. Think about that for a moment. Do any of you wear eyeglasses? If not, perhaps you know someone who does. Eyeglasses help a person see the world around him in a particular way. If a man with poor eyesight is wearing eyeglasses that a doctor has made specifically for him, he will see the world around him better. The problem in his eyes is corrected by the eyeglasses and he can see clearly. However, if another man with poor eyesight puts on glasses that were not made to correct the problem in his eyes, he will see worse. Both men will see things in a particular way. The man with the eyeglasses that were made for his eyes will see clearly. The man with the eyeglasses that were not made for him will see worse.

Worldviews are like eyeglasses. A worldview is the eyeglasses through which one looks at the world and at life. A person's worldview consists of the many beliefs he has about reality. The word reality refers to that which a person believes makes up the real world and life. A person's beliefs about reality include his beliefs about who God is, who he himself is, who others are, what spirits exist and how these important relationships work. Together these beliefs about reality form the eyeglasses through which a person sees all of life.

All people have worldview eyeglasses. Their worldview eyeglasses not only affect the way they see life, but also the way they relate to everything in life. This includes the way they relate to family members, the way they view sickness, the way they think about themselves and even the way they interact with spirit beings. When a person starts with Scripture to understand reality, he is like the man who is wearing the correct eyeglasses. He will have a true and proper worldview and see things as God desires. All his beliefs about reality will be based upon God and His Word. When a person does not start with Scripture, he is like the man who is not wearing the correct eyeglasses. He can still see things, but not correctly. He has many beliefs about reality, but they are not true and biblical. Therefore, he does not understand reality correctly as God wants him to. So add this new illustration to your understanding of a worldview: A worldview is the eyeglasses through which we view all of life.

## The Story of Correa

Earlier you heard a story from Papua New Guinea. Now you will hear another story from a different country. This story takes place in the country of Argentina. Argentina is at the southern end of the South American continent. The landscape of Argentina is very diverse, ranging from dry, vast deserts to enormous mountain ranges. Argentina has one of the largest mountain ranges in the world called the Andes Mountains. Many people who live in Argentina raise cattle. This has been done for many, many years and is a very important part of the country's economy. The main religion of Argentina is Roman Catholicism. The people who practice this religion believe in God and Jesus, but they also believe that some human beings who have died can now intercede for them. These deceased human beings are called saints. Many people in Argentina pray to saints for many different things. This is the story about a woman who is considered a saint by many of the people of Argentina.

Many years ago, a woman named Correa lived in a small village at the base of the Andes Mountains with her husband, Bustos, and their newborn son. They loved one another very much and were so happy to have their new baby. Just after their baby was born, a civil war broke out in Argentina. When their baby was just a few months old, Bustos was forced away from their home to serve in the army. Correa was so grieved when her husband, Bustos was taken, that she took their newborn son and tried to follow the men who took Bustos. She packed food and water for the journey. She would have to cross a hot, dry and dangerous desert in order to reach her husband. She carried her son and walked for days across the desert that had only a few shrubs and trees for protection from the sun. Her legs became weak and before long, she ran out of the food and water. She climbed to the top of a small hill to see if there were any signs of water. But there were no signs of water and no one to save her. On top of that hill, she collapsed of thirst and exhaustion and she died.

A couple of days later, some men who raised cattle saw vultures flying around the top of the small hill. They steered their cattle toward the hill to see what the vultures had found. There they saw the lifeless body of a beautiful woman. Miraculously, her child was still alive and nursing at her breast. It was a miracle that the baby had survived! The men wondered who this woman was. They searched her belongings and found a necklace with the name Correa on it. They buried her next to a nearby tree and carved "Difunta Correa" in the trunk of the tree. Difunta Correa means "deceased Correa." After they buried Correa, they took the baby boy to find someone who could care for him and raise him.

The men who found Correa told others about her. They told how the baby boy miraculously survived by nursing on her breast even after she had died. The story of what happened to Correa spread to the nearby towns over the next many years. The people in the towns began to think of Correa as a saint who had given her life for her child. The place where Correa died became sacred to the people. People began to pray to Correa. One man who prayed to Correa believed his prayers were miraculously answered. He built a small house of worship to honor Correa near the tree where Correa had been buried. After many years, other people built small houses of worship to Correa. Today there are 17 small houses of worship built on the hill where Correa died. The area is now called Vallecito.



Each year, thousands of people take their families on pilgrimages to Vallecito to honor Correa. They visit the houses of worship and hope that Correa will intercede for them and grant them supernatural favors. Bottles of water are the primary gift to Correa when people are trying to gain her favor. The bottle of water is a symbol of giving her the one thing that she needed before she died—water to quench her thirst. It is said that she also protects travelers and can bring wealth and good fortune.

Today, there are many shrines to Correa all over the country of Argentina. Many of these shrines are alongside roads that are frequently traveled. The shrines are often covered with hundreds of bottles of water left by travelers who are beseeching Correa's blessing for safe travel.

The story of Correa is very important to many people in Argentina. It is said that her mission is to protect travelers. People believe she can bring health, wealth and good fortune and will ask her to give them things they want.

### What is the Worldview of Those Who Worship Correa?

The people in Argentina who pray to Correa and build shrines to her have a worldview. As we review the story, think about what a worldview is. It is the eyeglasses through which people view life. It affects the way they interact with the many circumstances of life. To discover what these people believe about reality, their worldview, we will look at their behaviors.

you remember what some of the people who heard the story of Correa did? One man prayed to Correa. When he believed his prayer was answered miraculously, he built a small house of worship for Correa. Other people build shrines to Correa. Many people offer bottles of water to Correa beseeching her blessing for safe travel.

Now, in order to discover the worldview of the people who worship Correa, let us look at the life of one man as an example. We will begin by considering his observable behaviors. It is very common in Argentina to see a truck driver on his way to deliver a large truck full of cattle to stop in the middle of his long journey to leave a bottle of water at one of the roadside shrines to Correa. He will pull over his truck, get out with a fresh bottle of water and offer the bottle to Correa. His job as a truck driver is very important to him. It is the means by which he provides for his family. He will ask Correa for safety on his journey so that he can adequately take care of his family. If he is able to deliver the cattle safely to the destination, he will be paid money for his successful trip. He will then use that money to buy food and clothes, pay for a home and buy medicine if any of his family members are sick. He believes that he must pray to Correa and entreat her blessing so that he will have a safe and successful journey. After leaving the bottle of water at the shrine as a symbol of quenching Correa's thirst, he gets back in his truck and drives on. He is confident that Correa will give him safety now that he has taken the time to stop, offer her water and pray for her protection.

Now let us consider the observable behaviors of the truck driver in order to discover his worldview. What specific behaviors did the truck driver exhibit? He pulled over his truck right in the middle of his journey, offered a fresh bottle of water at the shrine to Correa and then prayed to Correa, asking her for safety in his travels. Were these things the truck driver did his

worldview? No, those things were not his worldview. Those were only his outward behaviors. His worldview affected his observable behaviors, but his behaviors are not his worldview. Let us continue to look further for the worldview of the truck driver.

The truck driver's occupation of transporting cattle from one destination to another was very important to him. Why? Because it was the means by which he could provide for his family. By transporting the cattle safely from one location to another, he earned money to support his family. He used the money to buy food, clothing and medicine for his family. So not only was the truck driver's occupation very important to him, his family was too. He knew that he must perform his occupation successfully in order to provide for his family. The truck driver's family and occupation were very important to him. So is his occupation as a truck driver his worldview? No, his occupation is not his worldview. His occupation is a part of his country's economy. His occupation is one of the cultural ways to make a living, but it is not his worldview. His worldview influenced the way he carried out his occupation, but his occupation itself is not his worldview. Is his family his worldview? No, his family is not his worldview. His family is part of what makes up the society in Argentina, but it is not the truck driver's worldview. The truck driver's worldview strongly influenced the way he sought to take care of his family, but his family itself is not his worldview.

Let us look further to discover the worldview of the truck driver. What did the truck driver value in life? He valued safety in his travels and success in his occupation. He valued protection, health and provision for his family. He valued honoring Correa. But are these values his worldview? No, these things are not his worldview, though they are closely connected to it.

So then what is the worldview of the truck driver? What are the eyeglasses through which he views life? The worldview of the truck driver is that he believes himself to be living in a world with God, people and various spirit beings called saints who can intercede for him in particular areas of his life. He believes that one of the saints who can help him is Correa. In his understanding of reality, he believes that she cares about him and has the power to bless him in the particular area of travel. So through his worldview eyeglasses, the truck driver sees himself in a relationship with various beings including Correa, who interacts with him personally and is able to protect him in his travels. He believes that if he relates to her correctly, she really can give him the things he asks for. So the truck driver's belief regarding Correa, along with his other basic beliefs about reality, form the worldview eyeglasses through which he looks at life and relates to it.

### Taking Another Look

Keep in mind that the truck-driver's worldview consists of his basic beliefs about reality. The truck driver's beliefs about reality include beliefs in various higher beings like God and the saints. He sees himself in relationship with these various beings that can influence his well-being and grant him success in life. Correa is one of these beings that form a part of his understanding about reality. He believes that Correa has certain power and is able to protect him if he maintains a right relationship with her.

It is important to see that this worldview of the truck driver strongly influences his values. For example, he believes he is in a relationship with Correa who has the power to bless him. Therefore he values honoring her and staying in a proper relationship with her so that he can receive her blessings to have safety, success and provision for his family. His worldview directly affects what he values.

Through his worldview, the truck driver sees Correa as an important part of being successful in his occupation and of providing for his family. Therefore, his worldview strongly influences not only what he values but also how he lives out his occupation and the ways in which he seeks to take care of his family. So from the example of the truck driver please also note that a worldview not only affects the values a person has but also greatly influences how he lives within his culture and society.

Finally, let us look again at the behaviors of the truck driver. He pulled his truck over in the middle of his journey, offered a bottle of water to Correa and prayed to her for safety in his journey. Why did he do these things? He did them because his worldview beliefs about reality saw Correa as one who could grant him safety and success if he honored her. Therefore, he actually did those things. So we see that all his observable behavior was based on his worldview as well.

It is very important to understand that the eyeglasses of his worldview strongly influenced every aspect of his life: what he valued, the way he lived out his occupation, the ways he sought to take care of his family and even his outward behaviors.

The truck driver is just one example of the many people who worship Correa. We can see by looking at the truck driver's actions that the way the people who worship Correa behave and think is affected by their worldview. The way they understand reality strongly influences how they act and think, what relationships are important to them and what they value. The worldview eyeglasses through which they see life affect every aspect of their lives.

### Lesson Review

When we heard the story of Bawame from Papua New Guinea, we only considered the outward behaviors of George and Harriett and Asebei. We concluded that underneath their outward behaviors was the way they looked at life. However, in this story about Correa and the people who worship her, we considered the very worldview of those people. We considered how that worldview affected all areas of life.

The people who worship Correa see the world and life through particular eyeglasses. They believe in a reality in which Correa exists and can provide protection, health and success. Therefore the people live in a way that keeps Correa in mind. They value honoring her and staying in a proper relationship with her in order to receive her blessings. They often think of how she can provide for and protect their families and give success in their occupations. And they act in ways to honor her: they pray to her, they offer water to her and they even give gifts of

thanks. So you can see their worldview strongly affects how they think, live and relate to the various circumstances of life.

You have heard the story of the people who worship Correa in order to consider how a person's worldview strongly influences what they value and how they live out every aspect of their lives. But it is not just the people who worship Correa that have a worldview. Everyone has a worldview. Everyone has eyeglasses through which they look at life. Just like the worldview of the people who worshiped Correa determined how they thought and lived, so the worldviews of all people strongly influence how they think and live their lives.

We need to carefully think about this very important matter of worldviews. The people to whom you proclaim the Gospel have a worldview. You will need to know how to discover the worldview of the people to whom you minister so that you can effectively proclaim God's message. If you understand their worldview well, it will guide you in clearly teaching God's Word to them.

Because this matter is so important, in the next Lesson we will continue to learn how and why a person's worldview affects how they live and relate to all of life.

## **Lesson Two**

### **Discovering Worldview from Observable Behaviors**

In this course, we are learning about worldviews and how they strongly influence every aspect of life. This Lesson we will continue to learn how and why a person's worldview affects how he lives and relates to all of life.

But first, let us review what we learned last Lesson. We learned that a worldview is the way a person looks at the world and at life. In the last Lesson we learned that another way to describe a worldview is the eyeglasses through which a person sees all of life. A person's worldview consists of the many beliefs he has about reality. The word reality refers to that which a person believes makes up the real world and life. A person's beliefs about reality include his beliefs about who God is, who he himself is, who others are, what spirits exist and how these important relationships work. Together these beliefs about reality form the worldview eyeglasses through which a person sees all of life.

We learned that worldviews have a great influence on every area of life. They powerfully influence such aspects of life as the various things people deeply value and believe about the way life ought to be lived. They shape strong emotions people feel regarding such things as how they believe they should carry out their livelihoods and how to protect and provide for their families. Worldviews strongly influence even the words people speak, the choices they make and the things they do.

We heard a story from Argentina about a woman named Correa. Do you remember what happened to Correa? After searching for her husband in the desert, she ran out of food and water and she died. But the child she was carrying in her arms survived by nursing on her breast. This was considered a miracle by the people who heard the story. They considered her a saint with supernatural powers. They built shrines to her and prayed to her. They left gifts at those shrines, including water bottles to quench her thirst.

Our goal in the last Lesson was to discover the worldview of the people who worshiped Correa. We looked specifically at the truck driver who worshiped Correa. We wanted to discover his worldview and see how it influenced how he lived his life. In order to discover his worldview, we carefully considered his outward behavior, the ways he lived out his occupation and sought to care for his family as well as what he valued. Do you remember what the worldview of the truck driver was? His worldview was that he believed himself to be living in a world with God, people and various spirit beings called saints who could intercede for him in particular areas of life and affect his well-being and success. He believed that one of the saints who could help him was Correa. He believed Correa related to him personally and could provide him with safety in his travels if he maintained a proper relationship with her. So we discovered that the truck driver behaved based on his belief regarding Correa, along with his other basic beliefs about reality. We learned the very important lesson that a person's worldview affects every aspect of his life.

The Bisorio People of Papua New Guinea

Now we will continue to learn how worldviews strongly influence every aspect of a person's life. This is very important for you and your ministry. The people to whom you proclaim the Gospel have a worldview. You will need to know how to discover the worldview of the people to whom you minister so that you can effectively proclaim God's message. If you only observe people's behaviors without discovering their worldview, or the eyeglasses through which they see life, you will misunderstand them. And if you misunderstand them, you will not be able to effectively share the Gospel with them. Therefore this matter of learning how to minister at a worldview level is extremely important.

In this Lesson, we will consider the worldview of the Bisorio people from Papua New Guinea. You will hear another story about the Bisorio people. From the story, we will again try to discover what the worldview of the people is. As you listen to the story, think about how their worldview influenced every aspect of their lives.

First, let me briefly remind you about the country of Papua New Guinea and who the Bisorio people are. Remember, Papua New Guinea is a large island north of Australia that is populated with many different people groups who speak many different languages. The Bisorio people lived deep in the dense jungles of Papua New Guinea and had very little contact with the outside world. They had never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The daily lives of the Bisorio people depended on what they could hunt for food or what their gardens might produce. If they did not kill a wild pig, a parrot or a crocodile that would nourish them for days, they would hope the spirits would look upon their gardens with favor and give them large harvests of sweet potatoes, taro root, bananas or sugar cane. The Bisorios lived in small hamlets among themselves and often warred with neighboring tribes. They lived in constant fear. Disease threatened their health at every turn. Hunger was prominent. The Bisorios believed that they as humans were intimately bound with nature and that this bond influenced many aspects of their lives. They believed they must live in harmony with the various spirits and forces that controlled different aspects of life. Therefore, they lived in great fear and with great anxiety, wondering if they were in harmony with the spirits and forces. Their fearful way of life was truly miserable and without hope.

Do you remember how God sent help to the Bisorios? In His sovereignty, God sent a Christian couple named George and Harriett to live in the small village with the Bisorio people. They wanted to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the Bisorios because they had never heard it before. George and Harriett made a small home out of trees from the jungle and began to live among the Bisorio people so they could learn their language, cultural customs and to build relationships with them. The language of the Bisorio people was completely unknown by outsiders. So before they could tell them about God and His Son, Jesus, George and Harriett first had to learn how to communicate with the Bisorios in a way they could understand. It took several years of listening, interacting with the people, making mistakes and building relationships before George and Harriett knew the language and culture well enough to share the Gospel with the Bisorios in a way they could understand.

As George and Harriett were learning the language and culture of the Bisorios, they learned about many of the beliefs of the Bisorio people. They were trying to discover their worldview.

Remember, the Bisorios had never heard about God and Jesus. They did not have God's Word. They did not even know that God and Jesus existed. So George and Harriett knew that in order to share the Gospel with the Bisorios in a way they could understand, they had to first learn their worldview. They listened to God's counsel through Solomon, the wisest man in the world, who wrote, "He who gives an answer before he understands, it is his folly and shame" Proverbs 18:13. George and Harriett needed to first understand the worldview of the Bisorios before they could communicate the Gospel to them in a way they could clearly understand.

As they lived among the Bisorios, George and Harriett learned that they believed that the sun had created the world, including themselves and all the things around them. The Bisorios believed that they were surrounded by many spirits, including good and evil spirits and ancestor spirits. They believed there were various forces that controlled reality.

One of the forces of reality they believed in was called, "Yu," which means, "the power of the ground." They believed Yu directly affected certain aspects of their lives. One specific aspect of life that Yu influenced was the health of human beings. Just like the people who worshiped Correa wanted to stay in a right relationship with her in order to receive her blessings, the Bisorios wanted to live in harmony with Yu so that they would have good health. The Bisorios believed there was a proper way to do everything in order to stay in harmony with Yu. For example, there was a proper way to plant a garden. There was even a proper way to harvest the sago palm.

The sago palm is a tall tree that grows in the jungles of Papua New Guinea. It grew in plenty in the jungles where the Bisorios lived. The Bisorios harvested the pulp of the sago palm for food. There was little nutrition in the pulp that the Bisorios would eat, but it was a way for the Bisorios to satisfy their hunger pangs when they were unable find food by hunting or from their gardens.

Now according to the Bisorios, there was a proper way to cut down and harvest the sago palm if they were to stay in harmony with Yu. If they did not harvest it in the proper way, there will ill effects. When a Bisorio man cut down a sago palm tree, they believed that as it fell down through the jungle, it must fall flat onto the ground. They had to remove any palm branches that were keeping the trunk from lying flat on the jungle ground. If the palm branches were in the way and prevented the trunk from lying flat on the ground, the Bisorios believed this was bad and caused a break in the harmony with Yu. It could even cause their children to become sick. However, if they cut down the sago palm in the proper way, they believed they stayed in harmony with Yu and any ill affects on people were prevented.

### The Story of Caba

Keep these beliefs about Yu in mind as I tell you this short story about a Bisorio man named Caba.

One morning, the small Bisorio village was soaking wet from the hard rains that had pounded the village the night before. As the sun began to shine, George looked out the window of his home and saw the muddied river overflowing the banks. The trees that hung over the village were still

dripping water, making ripples in the puddles on the ground. Most of the Bisorios were still in their huts preparing to eat sago for the morning meal.

George was sitting in his home, preparing to learn more about the Bisorio culture and language that day. He and Harriett were talking about what new words they had learned the day before. They liked to practice the new language with each other. As they were trying to form sentences together, George heard someone walking quickly outside. He looked out his door and saw one of the Bisorios, named Caba, walking quickly through the rain puddles toward the jungle. He was carrying an axe in one hand as his bare feet splashed across the wet ground. George called to him, “Caba! Caba, where are you going?” Caba stopped and turned to George. He had a worried look and said with deep concern, “My son is sick, George. He has been coughing all night. I just remembered we were in a hurry to cut down the sago palm yesterday because we could see a storm was coming. In working quickly so that we could get home before the storm, we left some of the branches sticking in the ground. I need to go cut the rest of the branches off so my son will get well.”

“Wait!” George said. He quickly went back into his house, measured a child’s portion of cough medicine into a small container, sealed it and brought it back out to Caba. He said, “Here, Caba. I have some cough medicine. Take this. Give it to your son so he will get better.”

Caba did not want to shame George by not taking the medicine, so he took it. But then he left immediately with his axe to go to the jungle to cut the rest of the branches off the sago palm. George returned indoors. He looked out his window just in time to see Caba heading into the jungle with his axe. George was puzzled. Why was Caba still going to cut the branches? He had the cough medicine for his son. Clearly, George still had much to learn about the Bisorios’ worldview.

### Discovering Caba’s Worldview

It was very important for George and Harriett to learn the worldview of the Bisorios so that they could minister to them wisely and effectively teach them God’s Word. You will also need to learn the worldview of the people to whom you minister. In order to help you learn how to discover the worldview of a people, let us try to discover Caba’s worldview based on the story you just heard. Remember, a worldview is the eyeglasses through which a person views all of life. We want to discover what reality looked like to Caba and how his worldview influenced what he valued, the choices he made and the actions he took. Why did Caba go cut the branches of the sago palm tree? What was his worldview that so strongly influenced his behavior?

Remember, in seeking to discover a person’s worldview we begin by considering their observable behaviors—what they do and what they say. So let us first look at Caba’s behaviors. Caba got up in the morning after his son had been coughing all night. He then took his axe and headed toward the jungle to cut off the remaining palm branches from the sago palm. When George gave him medicine, he took so he would not offend George, but then he still went into the jungle and cut the remaining palm branches off the tree. Now, were these actions Caba’s worldview? No, these behaviors were not Caba’s worldview, although his worldview strongly influenced these behaviors. Let us continue to try to discover Caba’s worldview.



Caba loved his son very much and wanted him to be healthy. He sought to help his sick son by affecting his healing in a particular way—by cutting the rest of the sago palm branches. So was his seeking to affect his son's healing in a particular way his worldview? No, the manner in which Caba sought to help restore his son's health was not his worldview. But carefully note that his worldview strongly influenced the way in which he sought to help his son.

Finding food to eat was also very important to Caba. Remember, the Bisorios lived day by day to find food to satisfy their hunger. The sago palm pulp that Caba harvested was a way to provide some food for himself and his family to keep from being hungry. Was harvesting sago palm from the jungle and the way in which he did it Caba's worldview? No, that was not his worldview. Harvesting sago from the jungle was one of the cultural means by which Caba provided for his family. That was not his worldview, but the method he used to harvest sago was strongly influenced by his worldview. Let us continue to look carefully to discover his worldview.

What did Caba value? What important relationship did he seek to maintain in order to affect well-being? He valued staying in harmony with Yu so that the well-being of his son could be restored. When he remembered that he had left branches sticking in the ground, he wanted to immediately go to cut off the branches. Why did he go do this? Caba wanted to restore harmony with Yu by properly cutting the branches of the sago palm. He believed by doing this he would restore a proper relationship with Yu and thereby see his son's health restored. But were these values Caba's worldview? No, harvesting sago palm the proper way so that he could stay in a right relationship with Yu was not his worldview though it was very closely connected to it. What he valued was derived from his worldview.

So what was Caba's worldview? What were the worldview eyeglasses through which he viewed life? Caba's worldview was that he believed that many forces controlled nature and that Yu was one of them. In his view of reality, he believed that as a human being he, and the rest of the Bisorios, were all intimately bound to the power of Yu. Therefore he believed he had to stay in harmony with Yu in order to have well-being. One of the ways to stay in good relationship with Yu was to harvest the sago palm in the proper way. These worldview beliefs about reality made up part of Caba's worldview eyeglasses. Therefore, he looked at life through those worldview eyeglasses and acted according to what he understood reality to be. What Caba valued, the emotions he felt, the actions he took and the choices he made were all affected by his worldview.

So again we see that a person's worldview affects every area of his life: what he values, how he seeks to maintain well-being, how he relates to life and what he does and says.

### A Very Important Question

One very important question remains. Why was George puzzled when Caba took the medicine, but then still went into the jungle to cut the branches off the sago palm? It was because George did not yet understand Caba's worldview. George was only addressing Caba's outward behavior. He thought giving Caba the medicine would achieve the same goal that Caba wanted to achieve in cutting off the remaining palm branches: to make his son well. But George did not yet

comprehend that in Caba's understanding of reality, medicine was not what would make his son better. In Caba's reality, restoring a proper relationship with Yu would make his son better. It was vital to Caba and his son's health that he cut the remaining branches off the sago palm in order to restore harmony with Yu. Caba's worldview directly influenced the actions he took.

This is very important to think about. George did not address Caba's actions at the worldview level. He did not understand what Caba was doing based on the way Caba understood reality. George missed the fact that Caba believed his son was sick because he had disrupted harmony with Yu and not because his son simply had a cough.

What about us? We desire to tell others about Christ. But do we know the worldview of those to whom we minister? It is absolutely vital that we are able to address the worldview beliefs of those to whom we minister. We must discover their worldview to understand how and why they do what they do. We must learn their language, their culture and their worldview. Only then can we accurately communicate the Gospel of Christ and see strong communities of Christian believers established. God's Word speaks to us regarding communicating to others: "If no one can understand what you are talking about, you will only be talking to the wind" 1 Corinthians 14:9. We do not want to be found "talking to the wind" as we proclaim the precious Good News of Christ!

### General Review about Worldview

In these Lessons we have learned how worldviews affect every area of life. Let us take some time to review all that we have learned in this course so far.

First, we have learned that the subject of worldview is very important. Like the foundation supports a house, learning how to minister at the worldview level will support and establish your ministry. It will help you build strong communities of Christian believers.

We have also learned that everyone has a worldview. It does not matter where they live, what religion they practice or what language they speak, all people have a worldview. Those worldviews deeply influence how people act in all areas of life, what they value, how they interact with others and how they relate to God.

We have considered what a worldview is. How would you describe a worldview? A worldview is the way a person looks at the world and at life. It strongly influences all areas of a person's life. We also described a worldview as the eyeglasses through which a person looks at life. A person's worldview consists of the many beliefs he has about reality. This includes his beliefs about who he is, who God is, who others are, what spirits exist, how we exist together and how these important relationships work. Together these beliefs form the worldview eyeglasses through which a person sees all of life.

In order to form a true biblical worldview, it is vital that we begin with a solid foundation. We learned that we must start with God and His Word. God is the ultimate and supreme authority over all of life. He has taught us in His word, through His actions in history and through the life

and words of His Son, the Lord Jesus, how we ought to live and think in a way that honors Him. In His grace, God our Father has given us His very thoughts in the Bible about how we ought to live and think in ways that are pleasing to Him. We must build our worldview foundation on the authority of God and His Word alone.

In God's Word, Solomon, the wisest man in the world, proclaimed that, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" Proverbs 1:7. To fear the Lord means to recognize Him as the ultimate authority and to do what He says. As we fear the Lord, we will humbly submit to His Word and by doing so will gain understanding and wisdom for how to live and think about all of life. We will learn how to form a true biblical worldview.

We have listened to three different stories about people who have different worldviews. We have seen how their worldviews influenced how they lived life, related to others and responded to situations in life. Ministering at a worldview level is critical. We heard about how Bawame's uncle Asebei behaved based on his worldview. We learned that the worldview of the truck driver who worshiped Correa strongly influenced his values, his occupation and his outward behavior. Today, we heard about Caba's worldview. We learned that Caba lived out his life based on maintaining harmony with Yu.

We have evaluated the worldviews of two specific people: the truck driver from Argentina who worshiped Correa and Caba, the Bisorio who sought to stay in harmony with Yu. Keep in mind how we discovered the worldviews of each of these men. We started by looking at the outward behaviors of a certain practice. We then considered how this practice was associated with how they lived out their everyday life in their work, cared for their loved ones or responded to the concern of maintaining well-being and success. Next we looked for what they truly valued as indicated by the relationships they sought to maintain. Finally, from understanding these valued relationships we discovered their worldview, the very reality through which they looked at the world and at life.

As you reflect on all that you are learning through this course, share with your friends what God is teaching you. Listen to what God is teaching them.

Though there is much more you will learn about worldviews, as you continue to think about how they influence every aspect of life, try to discover the worldview of another person. Begin your discovery by observing their outward behaviors with regard to a specific practice or custom. Try to think about how this practice affects the way they live their life, how they interact with others or how they respond to life's circumstances. Consider what they truly value in connection with this practice or custom. Try to discern what relationship they are seeking to maintain. Then see if you can determine how they see reality. See if you can discover their worldview.

We have learned a great deal about worldviews. We have learned over and over how very important worldviews are because they affect every area of a person's life. Since worldviews are so important, a couple of questions need to be asked. How are worldviews formed in the first place? Where does a person's worldview come from? We will begin to answer these questions in the next Lesson.

### **Lesson Three**

#### **How are Worldviews Formed?**

In this Lesson and the next Lesson, we will continue discussing worldviews and their importance to your life and ministry. So far, we have learned what worldviews are and how they affect every area of life. This Lesson, we will begin to learn how worldviews are formed in the first place. But first, let us review what we learned in the last Lesson.

In the last Lesson, we learned that worldviews strongly influence how a person behaves and views every area of life. Do you remember the story of Caba from Papua New Guinea? Caba looked through worldview eyeglasses that saw many spirits and forces of reality that affected life. He believed a force called Yu could affect the health of his family if he did not cut down the sago palm in the proper way. So when his son was coughing all night, he believed he was no longer in harmony with Yu because he had forgotten to cut all the branches off the sago palm the day before. We heard how Caba immediately went into the jungle the next day to cut the remaining branches off the sago palm. He believed by doing so, he would restore his harmony with Yu and thereby restore health to his son. We learned that Caba's worldview, and specifically his belief in Yu, affected what he valued, what relationships were important to him, how he carried out the harvesting of food and how he acted in various areas of his life.

We also learned a very important lesson about the need to minister to people at a worldview level. Do you remember what the missionary George did when Caba told him his son was sick? George gave Caba cough medicine for his son. George thought that by giving Caba the medicine, he would gladly take it and feel that he no longer needed to go into the jungle to cut the branches off the sago palm. But that was not the case. Even though Caba took the medicine, he still believed he was not in harmony with Yu. George was only addressing Caba's outward behavior rather than discovering and addressing his very worldview. We learned that in order to see genuine change in a person's life, we must learn how to discover a person's worldview and then minister to them at that level.

#### **Stories and Worldview Formation**

Let us continue to learn more about this vital matter of understanding worldview. In the last two Lessons, we have learned how to discover a person's worldview. But just where does a person's worldview come from? How does a person's worldview form in his mind and heart in the first place?

We have learned that all peoples have worldviews. And just as all peoples have worldviews, stories are universal among all cultures as well. There is a very close relationship between stories and the formation of worldviews. This is a very important truth to learn.

First, let us consider that all people love to tell and listen to stories. Good stories are a powerful and effective means of communicating and relating to one another. The stories people tell may be myths, legends or even actual history. Many of the stories people hear and believe actually shape their understanding of reality. Yes, these stories about reality form their worldview, the

eyeglasses through which they view all of life. This is a very important truth to learn if ministry is to be done at a worldview level. We will discover in this Lesson and the next the power of stories and the role they play in forming a worldview. This vital truth is something we will continue to learn throughout the rest of this course.

When we talk about stories in relation to their role in forming a worldview, we refer to those stories that people tell that speak about the very make-up—or nature—of reality. All peoples have stories about the nature of reality: the origin of the earth, where man came from, what gods and spirits exist, the origin of death, where thunder and lightning come from, what happens to people after death and many other such things. All of these stories about the nature of reality combine together to form a basic understanding of reality. Together they form one big, all-encompassing story that forms a person's understanding of reality, the worldview eyeglasses through which they view all of life. This all-encompassing story about reality helps a person understand where they came from, what spirits or beings exist, how they should relate to people or spirit beings, what happens when a person dies and what life means. This story helps a person interpret and relate to all the things that happen in his life.

But why are stories so powerful in influencing the formation of worldviews? Let us think about that for a moment by first recalling the teaching of our Lord. When Jesus was encountered by the Pharisees and asked what was the greatest commandment, he said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" Matthew 22:37-40. So what was Jesus teaching us? What was he really saying? What does He want us to understand as being the most important thing in all of life? He was saying that the most important thing in all of life is for us to live in proper, loving relationships - loving God with all of our mind and heart, and loving others as ourselves. Yes, God has created reality to be centered in relationships! The greatest thing that God our Father desires is that we live in a loving, joyful and harmonious relationship with Him and with one another.

So God has created every person on earth primarily for a loving relationship with Himself and with others. He has created reality to be centered on proper, loving and harmonious relationships.

Now think about this question: Why do you think God inspired most of the Bible to be written in stories? It is because God created us to be relational beings and stories powerfully communicate in the context of relationships! Because God made reality to be centered in relationships, stories—which communicate in the context of relationships—are one of the most powerful means God has used to teach us and communicate with us. He has used stories to teach us His truth and thereby help us to form a true and proper worldview.

### The Power of Story

Now before we specifically consider how God has used stories in His Word to help us as humans to form a proper worldview, let us consider what stories can do. Why are they such a powerful means of communication?

When someone tells a story, they are not just merely passing on information. Remember, stories are powerful because they speak to the relationships of life. Therefore, they capture our imaginations, shape our perceptions, communicate values and stir our emotions. Stories can affect a person's understanding of certain aspects of life and even the choices they make. Yes, stories, if told well, can attract listeners rather than forcing people to listen. They make communication and understanding easier. In light of what has just been said, let us consider some examples of stories to show how powerful and effective they are.

First let us remember a part of the story of Bawame and her uncle Asebei.

Asebei heard that Bawame was sick, and he hurried into the Bisorio village to see her. As he gazed at her frail body, his heart ached for his niece to be well. He wanted to do everything in his power to make her well again. So Asebei took Bawame from the house she was in and told her he would care for her and protect her. As they arrived at his jungle hamlet, He made a small resting place for her. Daily, he would hunt tirelessly for food to sustain her. He brought her water and encouraged her to drink for her health. Many times a day he went off by himself to offer sacrifices to the ancestor spirits, imploring their help to heal Bawame. He continuously tried to appease the ancestors and yet Bawame slipped slowly away. One afternoon when he returned from offering sacrifices to the ancestor spirits, he found her in her small resting place, eyes closed and no longer breathing. Bawame had died. Asebei's heart was crushed with despair, as he fell to his knees and grasped her lifeless body, weeping and wailing uncontrollably.

As you hear this story, how does it make you feel? Perhaps you felt troubled, longing for Bawame to get better. Perhaps you felt empathy for Asebei as he tried to make Bawame better in every way he knew. Perhaps you were terribly saddened by Bawame's death and felt true empathy for Asebei as he deeply mourned. We can see from this example that stories affect our emotions. They have the ability to make a person feel uncomfortable, angry, sad or empathetic. The reason we feel these emotions when we hear this story is because God created reality to be centered in proper relationships. Relationships matter! Stories are powerful because they truly communicate the relational nature of reality as purposely created by the eternal, personal God. Yes, God created us for proper relationships. We know the importance of relationships. We ourselves have cared for someone in a way that we will do anything to help them get better.

Let us review one more story we have already heard to see the power and effect stories can have.

Do you recall the story of Correa? Correa was so sad when her husband, Bustos was taken, that she took their newborn son and tried to follow the men who took Bustos. She packed food and water for the journey. She would have to cross a hot, dry and dangerous desert in order to reach her beloved Bustos. She carried her son and walked for days across the desert that had only a few shrubs and trees for protection from the sun. Her legs became weak and before long, she ran out of the food and water. She looked for more food and water, but could not find any. She was so exhausted and weak. But she kept looking for Bustos. She climbed to the top of a small hill to look to see where she could go for water. She looked for signs of where Bustos might be. But there was nothing around and no one to save her. There were no signs of water anywhere. On top of that hill, she collapsed of thirst and exhaustion and she died.

How did you feel when you heard the story of Correa? What did you feel toward Correa? Perhaps this story caused you to deeply empathize with Correa and the love she felt for her husband. Perhaps you felt admiration for Correa as she demonstrated loyalty to her husband in following diligently after him no matter how difficult. Perhaps you felt sadness for the little baby, wishing that the little newborn did not have to go through that experience. This story illustrates well how stories are relational. Relationships truly matter just as God intended! When the relationship between cherished family members is affected, we can relate to it. We understand what it is to love someone, whether it be a husband or wife, a mother or father, a sister or brother or even a friend. Whether those relationships succeed or fail, it pulls at our emotions. Stories are told and heard in the context of relationships. That is why stories are so powerful. They can inspire. They can pull you into them and make you feel as though you are a part of them. They draw you in rather than forcing you in. You understand them because you understand relationships.

Now listen to another short story.

Boris and his wife Elena lived and worked in Russia. In the middle of a wintry day, Boris came running into their house. He was holding a cloth up to his face and there was blood everywhere. “Elena! Elena!” he yelled for his wife. Elena rushed into the room where Boris had come in. “Boris! Oh no, Boris! What is wrong?” she covered her mouth in surprise and horror at her husband’s bleeding face. Boris removed the cloth from his face to reveal he had no nose!

That is a true story! It really happened! How does this story affect you? Perhaps you were anxious to know why Boris was calling for his wife. Did this story leave you wondering what happened to Boris’ nose? Perhaps you even imagined an ending to this story. As you can see, stories can also create mystery. They stir a person’s imagination and emotions and create curiosity. Stories are powerful!

From the examples we’ve heard, we see that stories communicate relationally. They have the power to influence the way people see and feel things. They can affect the perspectives people take and the meanings they draw from life. They can even affect the choices they make. So we can begin to see how stories have a powerful connection to worldview formation. Beliefs, emotions, values and behaviors are meaningless without the context of a story.

### A Story from God’s Word: The Third Day of Creation

We have considered the power of stories. Let us now consider more specifically stories and worldview formation. Let us look into God’s Word and learn how God Himself has used stories to speak to us so that we might come to have a true, biblical worldview.

As you know, God Himself has told us many stories in His Word in order to teach us truth. Remember, He created reality to be centered in proper and loving relationships with Himself and with one another. The stories God told us are very powerful and shape our worldview. Let us

consider one story of many that God has told us in His Word and learn what He has taught us through it. Let us carefully consider how He desires it to affect the formation of our worldview.

As the Bible begins, God tells us of the creation of the world. He tells us the story of His creation of the entire world. In this section, we will consider what God did on the third day of creation. As in all His stories God teaches us many things through what He did.

This is the story of the third day of creation and what God has taught us through it. But first, we will begin by briefly noting what happened on the first and second day.

In the very beginning of creating, when everything was dark and without form, the Bible says God commanded by His powerful word, "Let there be light," and light appeared. Just as God commanded, light appeared! God was very pleased with what He saw. The light was good. He separated the light from the darkness, calling the light "Day" and the darkness "Night." That is what happened on the first day.

On the second day, with light shining but everything still without form, God commanded again by His powerful word. He said, "Let there be a dome to divide the water and to keep it in two separate places." And it was done. So God made a dome, and it separated the water under it from the water above it. God named the dome "Sky." Evening passed and morning came. That was the second day. That is what happened on the second day.

Let us continue by considering more fully what God did on the third day.

Imagine what the earth looked like at the end of the second day of creation. Water covered the entire earth. Everywhere you looked, there was water—only water. There was no land, no trees, no plants, no animals and no humans. Nothing but water. It is difficult to even imagine a world without anything but water. Just a vast, endless ocean. No life within the ocean, just water!

But then, on the third day, our great God spoke again. Let us hear what He has said in His Word about what He did on the third day of creating the world.

“Then God commanded, ‘Let the water below the sky come together in one place, so that the land will appear’—and it was done. He named the land "Earth," and the water which had come together he named "Sea." And God was pleased with what he saw. Then He commanded, ‘Let the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit’—and it was done. So the earth produced all kinds of plants, and God was pleased with what He saw. Evening passed and morning came—that was the third day.” Gen 1:9-13

Again, just by speaking with His voice, God caused dry ground to appear! It happened just as He commanded. There was now both land and seas placed exactly where He desired.

Just as God had created the light and the sky, now He brought forth land! God created all this only by His spoken Word. Think about that. Who is like Him? When He commands something to happen just with His voice, it happens exactly as He says.



No one can hinder what God commands from coming to pass. No one! Think about that. You are living on the very earth that God Himself spoke into existence! It came to be as He commanded. Look at the sky and feel the ground on which you are sitting. It all came to be just as God commanded! God demonstrated His power and authority by how He created the earth. He created solely by His voice, and it came to be.

Now carefully consider what God is teaching us through the story of what He did. Observe how the story of what He did in creation teaches us about who He is and what He is like. He, and He alone, is uniquely divine and all-powerful. There is none like Him! God wants us to have a proper worldview. He wants us to understand reality as it truly is. Yes, He wants us to first of all understand who He is—the Sovereign Creator and Lord of the Universe! He teaches us through the stories of His Word so that we might think correctly about Him and about ourselves, seeing all of life through proper worldview eyeglasses!

Let us continue to think and reflect about what God did on the third day of creation.

God, in His goodness, made both land and water. Think about that. Imagine an earth without water. How would you clean? What would you drink after working in the garden beneath the hot sun, soaked in sweat and desperately needing something to quench your thirst? Where would fish live?

God is so good. He is so incomparably good. He wonderfully provided for us and the rest of creation. He did not create the earth to be a bad or confusing place. God created the earth and it was good—very good. He did not create things to be difficult because He is good and only good.

After God made the land appear, He then commanded that all kinds of plants and trees grow upon that land. These plants and trees were commanded to bear many kinds of wonderful and delicious fruit—the very food that nourishes us today! Indeed, God is good, kind and loving.

Think of some of the different kinds of plants and trees that God created. Think about some of the plants and trees that grow near you. What types of trees do you use for building? What fruit do you enjoy eating? He is truly a wonderful, loving and awesome God!

What other plants and trees that God created do you use on a daily basis? Perhaps you eat of them. Perhaps you use them for building. Perhaps you grow their seeds in your gardens. Think of all the fruits and vegetables you enjoy eating. Think about their deliciousness and goodness. Is not He truly good and kind?

Why did God create all these good and wonderful things? Did He create them for Himself? No! The eternal, self-existing God does not even have a need to eat! He created all these good and delicious things for you and for me!

Let us carefully consider again what God is teaching us. What does He want us to learn? God shows us by what He created and provided for us that He is good and kind and that He loves us and truly cares about us. He created all this food for our good and for our pleasure, desiring that we enjoy them. If that were not so, He would not have created all these wonderful things for us.

He wants us to understand and learn this truth well. He, as Sovereign Creator and Lord over all things, is good, kind and loving. He created reality so that we might live with Him and with one another in great joy, peace and harmony.

God wants us to have a proper worldview. He teaches us truth through the stories in His Word so that we will have a proper worldview. He wants us to understand reality as it truly is. He desires that we all understand Him, ourselves and the creation around us correctly, seeing all of life through proper worldview eyeglasses. Having a proper worldview, we will have the proper thoughts, emotions and understanding about the various relationships in life. Thank God for His Word!

In creating all the good food for us to enjoy, God created everything to reproduce “after their kind.” Think about that. He wanted life to be orderly for us, not difficult or confusing. He is so wise and faithful. He does not deceive or trick us. He is the one who causes all things to grow properly.

Imagine if you worked very hard to plant rice and potatoes in your fields, but later when you went to see how things were growing you saw only weeds in place of the rice and potatoes! How awful and frustrating that would be! But God is good, wise and faithful. He designed plants to reproduce after their kind, that is, to grow from their seeds so that you find potatoes and rice where you planted potatoes and rice.

Yes, God is very good, wise and faithful. He does not do bad or confusing things. He never tries to deceive us or trick us. He created everything so that it would be beneficial for us and life would not be difficult. He loves you and cares deeply about you.

The third day ended with God seeing all that He had created being good. It was exactly as He commanded and desired it to be. What a powerful, good, kind and wise Creator we have!

So we see that God Himself used the story of creation to teach us a proper way to view reality. He desires us to see Him as powerful and the ultimate authority over all of life: He spoke, and what He commanded came to be. God desires us to see Him as good and full of kindness and wisdom: He created good and delicious reproducing trees and plants for us so that we might enjoy them fully. God teaches us through this story that He is a good and faithful God. In teaching us through this story, He desires that we view all of life through worldview eyeglasses that see Him as the ultimate authority, as powerful and as good, kind, faithful and wise. As a proper worldview continues to form in our hearts by listening to the stories of God’s Word, we will grow in having proper thoughts, emotions and understanding about all of life.

You have probably already taken the course called Telling God’s Story. This course teaches you how to tell the story of God to the people you are ministering to from creation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is one of the most powerful ways to communicate the Gospel because it speaks to people at the level of worldview, answering questions relating to sin, suffering, sorrow, sickness, God and Who He is, who man is, where the spirits come from, how to find answers to guilt and sin, and many other aspects. Use the Story of God to give an overview. Use specific stories from the Bible to speak to the deep issues that people face.

For example, when people fear the spirits, find Bible stories that show God's power over the spirits. When people mourn for the dead, you can tell stories of God's power of death. When people fight one another or there is warfare, there are stories from the Bible that speak to these issues and God's view of conflict. Where there is shortage of food and water, the Bible has stories that show God's heart of compassion and power to provide. Where women feel demeaned (very common in many cultures), the Bible shows God's care for them, how he answers their prayers, how he heals, feeds, and even raises the dead on their behalf. Use these stories to speak to people at their worldview level.

### Lesson Review

This Lesson we have learned that there is a very close relationship between worldview formation and stories. God has designed his creation to live in harmonious relationships—with Him and with one another. He Himself uses stories in His Word to teach us truth and to give the foundation for our worldview formation. He uses stories because stories are a powerful means of communicating in the context of relationships.

We also learned that stories are very powerful. They affect our emotions. They draw us in to listen. They create mystery. They speak to us at a relational level. We understand them because we ourselves are in relationships with others just as God created us to be. Through three example stories, we learned how stories pull us in and affect our emotions. We learned first-hand the power of stories.

Finally, we heard a specific story about how God created the land, trees and plants on the third day of creation. We learned that God used this story to teach us important things about Himself: that He is all-powerful, good, wise and faithful. In teaching us, He desires that we look through proper worldview eyeglasses that see Him, ourselves and the created order according to truth.

Now that we have heard about the powerful influence of stories as well as how God Himself uses stories to affect our worldview formation, try to tell a story to a friend or two. Think of a popular proverb or a popular saying that you have heard in your culture. Then, create a story to communicate that proverb or saying. Use the powerful elements of stories that we learned in this Lesson: draw on emotions, create mystery, stir curiosity. After the story, ask your friends what the story means to see if they understand what you wanted to communicate. Consider what you did well in telling the story. What did you learn from this experience that can make you a better story teller?

In the next lesson, we will learn how Jesus used stories to address people's worldviews.

## **Lesson Four**

### **God's Word, Stories and Worldview Formation**

In this Lesson, we will learn how Jesus used stories to address people's worldviews. We will hear two stories that Jesus told to help people see and understand life in a way that was pleasing to God. But first, let us review what we learned in the last Lesson.

In the last Lesson we learned that there is a very close relationship between worldview formation and stories. Do you remember why? God has designed His creation so that we would live in harmonious relationships with Him and with one another. Therefore in His Word, the Bible, God uses stories to teach us because stories are a powerful means of communicating in the context of relationships. God uses stories in His Word to teach us truth to help us to form a true and proper worldview.

We also learned that because stories are told and heard in the context of relationships they are very powerful. They have the power to influence the way we see things. They affect our emotions. They draw us in to listen. They create mystery. They can even affect the choices we make. Stories speak to us at a relational level. We understand why they can have such powerful influence because we ourselves are in relationships with others just as God created us to be. Through three different example stories, we learned how stories can pull us in and affect us. We learned first-hand the power of stories.

We also heard a specific story from the Bible about how God created the land, trees and plants on the third day of creation. We learned how God used this story to form a proper worldview within man. Through the story of the third day of creation God teaches us important things about Himself: that He is all-powerful, good, wise and faithful. He teaches us that He truly loves us and cares for us as our Creator God. In teaching us through the stories of His Word, He desires that we look through proper worldview eyeglasses that see Him, ourselves and the created order according to truth.

#### **Jesus Used Stories to Address People's Worldviews**

Let us now continue and consider how Jesus used stories to address people's worldviews. Since the time that God created the world, many people have faithfully followed God and His Word, but many others have not truly followed Him. People started adding to God's story with stories of their own. These stories of their own influenced their worldview formation and how they looked at life. In fact, many people added so much to God's story that it was hard to remember just how God wanted them to look at reality and live their lives. They did not have a right worldview and therefore viewed the important issues of life in the wrong way. It was as though they were wearing the wrong eyeglasses!

God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of the world and to declare God's truth to man. And so as Jesus lived upon the earth He taught people God's truth from the Holy Scriptures. He wanted people to gain a proper understanding of reality so that they could truly know God and live honorably for Him as God desires.

It is very important to God that we understand how He wants us to live and think. He cares deeply about the relationship we have with Him and the relationships we have with others. Remember, God created us to enjoy loving and harmonious relationships. And so because stories powerfully communicate in the context of relationships, God uses stories all through the Bible to help us form a true worldview.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus also often used stories to help people understand how to have a proper worldview. Many times people would ask Jesus questions about what He was teaching them. Jesus would often answer their questions with stories to help them have a clear understanding of how God wanted them to view reality. He taught them truth so that could gain a true worldview and come to properly understand God, themselves and the world.

The Pharisees were a group of people that often had questions for Jesus. They were experts and teachers of the Law that God had given to the people of Israel through Moses. However, over the course of time the Pharisees added to God's Word. They added to what God taught in the Scriptures. Because the Pharisees had added to God's stories and His law, they had a wrong worldview and did not look at life in a proper way. They challenged the things Jesus taught the people and tried to catch Him teaching against God's law. But Jesus was God's Son and He knew exactly what God wanted to teach the people.

Let us now listen to a story from the Bible about Jesus addressing a man's wrong worldview.

One day, a Jewish man who was considered an expert in knowing God's law asked Jesus a question about eternal life. This was a common question that religious leaders discussed in those days. Many people thought they could earn eternal life from God by the good deeds they did. So this man asked Jesus a question about how to gain eternal life. Even though the man was confident he knew the correct answer, he wanted to see how Jesus would answer. This man was confident that he had a proper worldview before God, but the truth was he had a wrong worldview. He wrongly thought his good deeds would earn him eternal life. But listen to what happened and what Jesus taught him.

### The Story of the Good Samaritan

A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?"

Jesus answered him, "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

The man answered, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind'; and 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'"

"You are right," Jesus replied; "do this and you will live."

But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"  
Luke 10:25-29

Now let us pause here to reflect. Let us consider the way in which Jesus answered the teacher of the law's question about eternal life. First of all, He pointed the man's attention to the very Word of God, the only source of truth! He wanted the man's worldview to be formed on the foundation of the Scriptures—the only foundation for a true and proper worldview.

Let us also carefully note that when Jesus told the man he was right in his answer, He was not telling the man he could gain eternal life by loving God and man. Just the opposite! Jesus wanted the man to understand in his own mind the impossibility of doing what the man thought would gain him eternal life – loving God with all his heart, mind and soul and his neighbor as himself. No man can perfectly love God and his fellow man. No one can earn eternal life by the deeds they do. The teacher of the law began to feel convicted of his inability to love God and his neighbor as he should so he sought to limit his responsibility to God and his fellow man and asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answered the teacher of the Law by telling him a story. Listen carefully to this story Jesus told in response to the man's question, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answered, "There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side.

In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side.

But a Samaritan who was traveling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Take care of him,' he told the innkeeper, 'and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.' "

And Jesus concluded, "In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbor toward the man attacked by the robbers?"

The teacher of the Law answered, "The one who was kind to him." Jesus replied, "You go, then, and do the same." Luke 10: 30-37

### What was Jesus Teaching the Teacher of the Law?

Now let us take a closer look at the story Jesus told the teacher of the Law to better understand the worldview Jesus wanted him and those who were listening to have.

First of all, notice that rather than answering the man's question directly, Jesus told a story to help everyone listening have a clear understanding of who a person's neighbor really is. You see, Jesus did not just want to address the outward behavior of the teacher of the Law and the people

who were listening. He wanted to address their worldview—the way they looked at the world and at life. He wanted to teach them how they ought to live in relationship with others based on what God desires. He wanted them to have a proper worldview. He wanted them to understand who man really is, who God really is and what God really desires the purpose of man to be—no matter who that man is or what his race, language or culture is!

Through the story, Jesus showed that even though the priest and the Levite were religious leaders and were supposed to know God's law well, their worldview was wrong. They did not have a good understanding of the Scriptures. They cared more about keeping clean than truly loving their neighbor as themselves. And so they wrongly passed by the man who had been beaten and was suffering on the roadside.

The Samaritan on the other hand, who was despised by the priests, the Levites and the experts in the Law, had a proper worldview. The religious leaders of the Jews thought Samaritans were a mixed race and did not properly understand God and His ways. But in Jesus' story the Samaritan did understand God and His ways! He was in a proper relationship with God and had a proper perspective before Him. He understood that the traveler who had been robbed and beaten, regardless of his ethnicity, was his neighbor and God desired that he relate to him lovingly. Because he had a proper worldview, he had a proper interpretation of the horrible circumstance and through the life of God within him it produced the proper feelings, and led to the proper actions!

Through this story Jesus was teaching that it does not matter what a person's race, language or culture is, any human being in need is one's neighbor! That is the proper worldview understanding God wants us to have.

After telling this story, Jesus asked the teacher of the law who of the three men acted like a neighbor to the injured traveler. When the teacher of the law answered that it was the Samaritan who had helped the traveler, Jesus saw that the man had begun to gain a proper worldview. He then told him to "go and do the same." Jesus wanted the teacher of the law to live and act in a way that showed his proper worldview understanding.

### The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Now, let us listen to another story Jesus told in order to address a wrong worldview.

Jesus told this story to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else. They had a wrong worldview. Their understanding of reality was wrong. Just like the teacher of the Law did not understand who man and God really were, these people did not understand who God was, who they themselves were and what their own need before God was.

Unlike the story of the Good Samaritan, this story was not told in response to a question. However, Jesus wanted to address the wrong worldview of the people by telling a story that they could clearly understand.

Before you hear the story, let us consider the background of the people in the story. This story is about a Pharisee and a tax collector. Remember, the Pharisees were great religious leaders for the Jewish people. They were considered experts in the Law that God had given to the people of Israel. They were considered the most pious of all the Jewish people. Tax collectors, on the other hand, were the most despicable people to the Jews. They were often considered traitors to their own people because they worked with the Roman government in deceitful ways to extort money from the people.

Keep this in mind as you hear the story Jesus told to the people.

"Once there were two men who went up to the Temple to pray: one was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood apart by himself and prayed, 'I thank you, God, that I am not greedy, dishonest, or an adulterer, like everybody else. I thank you that I am not like that tax collector over there. I fast two days a week, and I give you one tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector stood at a distance and would not even raise his face to heaven, but beat on his breast and said, 'God, have pity on me, a sinner!' I tell you," said Jesus, "the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, was in the right with God when he went home. For those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made great." Luke 18:9-14

### What was Jesus Teaching?

This story Jesus told very likely shocked the people who were listening. The Pharisees were esteemed by all to be the most pious and yet they had a very wrong understanding of reality. They thought very highly of themselves and looked down on others. They believed the things they did and the way they prayed earned them the right to be in the presence of a holy God. But they did not understand that they too, like all men, were sinners. They did not understand that they too were in great need of God's forgiveness through His mercy and grace alone. They did not have a proper understanding of themselves and their relationship to God. Their wrong worldview led to a wrong interpretation of life, wrong actions, and even wrongly praying to God!

Though the tax collector was despised by fellow Jews, he had a proper worldview. He understood reality before God. He understood who God was and what his needs were before God. He understood that God was holy and that he was a sinner in great need before God. He knew his only hope to stand in His presence was mercy from God, and so he cried out, "God, have pity on me, a sinner." The tax collector's proper worldview led him to interact with God properly and actually led him into a real, living and proper relationship with God. It is vital to understand that a person's worldview can determine their relationship to God and ultimately their eternal destiny!

So Jesus illustrated through this story man's need before God. He demonstrated that it matters what we believe at the worldview level. It determines how we think about God, how we think about ourselves and how we relate to others.



As Christians, we must be open to examine our own worldview to see if it is biblical. In what areas may God want us to grow and our worldview change to be more in keeping with His Word? We must view reality as God intended us to view it and then live a life that is honorable to Him.

It is vital that we assess our own worldview in light of what God teaches us, especially if we desire to teach others about Christ.

### Lesson Review

Let us review what we have learned in this Lesson. We have heard two stories that Jesus taught in order to help people better understand how to form a true and proper worldview. The lessons Jesus taught have been simple but very important!

We learned through the story of the Good Samaritan that God desires us to view ourselves, others and Him in a proper way. His desire is that we look through worldview eyeglasses that see others with the compassion and love He has for us—regardless of a person’s race, language or culture.

We learned through the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector that all men must come before God in humility, knowing that we are all sinners in need of His mercy and grace to make us right before Him. In both stories we learned that we must have a biblical worldview in order to see and live life as God desires. And a proper worldview is only gained through God’s Word.

### Assignment

1. Having heard two stories that Jesus told to address wrong worldviews, discuss the story of the Prodigal Son in your class and see if you can discover how He is addressing wrong worldviews through the story.
2. In Ethiopia there is a tribe that is very dominate by evil spirits. They have witchdoctors who demand every family come every four months with a goat or sheep sacrifice to placate the demons. There are rules that govern everything the people do to keep the spirits from getting angry. If there is trouble in a family, the witchdoctor is called to identify which rule was broken and what sacrifice must be made to amend the wrong. If you were a missionary among these people, which stories would you chose to tell them dealing with 1) fear of the spirits, 2) loss of valuable animals for sacrifice, and 3) the bondage of rules related to what they can eat, where they can walk, how they plant their fields, who they can see in their families and who are forbidden, and the social pressures associated with trying to maintain all these rules and regulations.

## **Lesson Five**

### **What is the Nature of Worldviews?**

In this Lesson, we will be further considering the nature of worldviews in light of all that God has been teaching us. But first, let us review what we learned in the last Lesson.

In the last Lesson, we heard two stories that Jesus taught in order to help people better understand how to have a true and proper worldview. We learned through the story of the Good Samaritan that God desires us to view ourselves, others, and Him in a proper way. His desire is that we look through worldview eyeglasses that see others with the compassion and love He has for us—regardless of a person's race, language or culture. We also heard the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. We learned that all men must come before God in humility, knowing that we are all sinners in need of His mercy and grace to make us right before Him. In both stories we learned that we must have a biblical worldview in order to see and live life as God desires. And a proper worldview is only gained through God's Word.

We have learned in the last two Lessons that stories are a very important part of worldview formation. Remember, the stories that help to form a worldview are stories that people tell that speak about the very nature of reality. All peoples have stories about the nature of reality: the origin of the earth, where man came from, what gods and spirits exist, the origin of death, where thunder and lightning come from, what happens to people after death and many other such things. All of these stories about the nature of reality combine together to form a basic understanding of reality. Together they form one big, all-encompassing story that forms a person's understanding of reality, the worldview eyeglasses through which he views all of life. This all-encompassing story about reality helps a person understand where they came from, what spirits or beings exist, how they should relate to people or spirit beings, what happens when a person dies and what life means. This story helps a person interpret and relate to all the things that happen in his life.

In this Lesson, we will learn more about that all-encompassing story and what the source of that story is. In doing so, we will be learning more about the nature of worldviews.

### **Authority and Worldviews**

As we consider the nature of worldviews in this Lesson, we must first understand that the all-encompassing story that forms a person's worldview has a source. Just like a river has a source from which it springs, the stories that help to form a person's worldview have a source. This source is that which a person believes tells them what is ultimately true and right and good. Remember, we have learned that the Bible is the only true source of knowledge and wisdom. God is the ultimate authority in the universe and He is the only One who can tell us what is true and right and good. But not all people recognize God as their ultimate authority. Not all people look to God's Word and the stories He has told us. If they do not acknowledge God and His Word as the ultimate authority for their understanding of reality, then who is their ultimate authority? What stories do they believe to be true about the nature of reality and what is the source of those stories? To whom do they give their allegiance and trust to tell them what is true?

These are important questions we must ask in order to determine the source of the all-encompassing story that forms a person's worldview.

The source or the authority of a person's all-encompassing story is very important because it forms his worldview. That authoritative source could be the Bible. For some people perhaps it is the Koran or the Tao Te Ching or the oral beliefs passed down from ancestors. No matter what a person's authoritative source is, it has a vital role in shaping the all-encompassing story that forms a person's worldview.

Why is this so important? First of all, it is important to learn what one's authoritative source for their worldview is because we must address that source when we address his worldview in sharing the Gospel. When you tell others about the Gospel, you will need to understand not only what they believe about the world and life, but also what the source is for those beliefs. When you minister to others at the worldview level, you will find that there is indeed a difference between the authoritative source of God Himself and whatever other source they trust. This understanding will guide you in wisely and lovingly sharing God's message with them.

Let us here recall the words of our Lord Jesus who said, "No man can serve two masters. He will either hate the one and love the other. Or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other" Matthew 6:24. What is the principle He is teaching us? How does this truth that He spoke apply to the subject of worldview? It applies in this way: A person cannot have or serve two authoritative sources regarding his worldview. He cannot have two views of reality. Yes, he cannot have two worldviews! He must live unto one or the other. This is very important to learn!

God teaches us in His Word that His authority on earth was first challenged just after He finished creating the world. Let us carefully consider God's testimony about this matter. As you know, in the beginning He had created Adam and Eve and gave them the beautiful and plentiful Garden of Eden in which to live. Of all the delicious fruits there were to eat in the garden, God told Adam and Eve they were not allowed to eat of only one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said if they ate the fruit of that tree, they would surely die. But Satan came into the garden and contradicted what God had said. He told Adam and Eve that they would not die if they ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said to man, "You will surely die." Satan said to man, "You will not die." Who was telling the truth about the nature of reality? Here, in the very beginning of man's history on earth, God's authoritative word about what is true was challenged. First, Satan challenged God's authority by saying Adam and Eve would not die from eating the fruit. Then man challenged God's authority by believing Satan's word rather than God's Word. Adam and Eve had to choose whom to believe. God said they would die if they ate of the fruit and Satan said they would not die. As you know, it was God's Word that was true! The struggle about who is the authoritative source of truth has existed since God created Adam and Eve and it continues to exist today.

As you go forth to minister the Gospel to others, you will encounter this problem. You will consistently find that people will question the truthfulness of God's Word. People who do not trust God and His Word as their authoritative source concerning what is true about the world and life will trust something or someone else.

It is important to note that one's acceptance of an authoritative source involves the commitment of a person too. We have learned that a person's worldview strongly influences the way he lives and views life. We learned from the story of Correa that the truck driver's worldview strongly influenced how he behaved, how he cared for his family and what he valued. He believed the story about Correa that he had heard from others. Even though that story is not in God's Word, he believed those who told it. Those who told it were his authoritative source and he lived his life believing the story about Correa to be true. He trusted her because he had heard that she answered other people's prayers. His belief of the story about Correa shaped his worldview. We can see by the way the truck driver lived his life he was committed to his worldview, having accepted those who told it as telling the truth. Without the truck driver realizing it, his thoughts, his emotions and his allegiance were tied directly to his worldview, and to those who helped shape it.

Let's consider another example from the life of the Pharisees. Remember, the Pharisees were great religious leaders for the Jewish people. They were considered experts in the Law that God had given to the people of Israel. They were considered the most pious of all the Jewish people. They were very confident that they understood what was true about God, the world and life. And yet they had a very wrong understanding of reality! Because they had added stories to God's Word they did not have a proper understanding of the world, others or themselves and their relationship to God. They had a wrong worldview. The reason for their wrong worldview was that the Pharisees had substituted their own teachings for God's Word. They accepted themselves as an authoritative source for what is true, instead of accepting God and His Word alone as the sole authority for understanding what is true, right and good.

So we can see from the examples of the truck driver and the Pharisees that the stories people listen to and who they believe as telling the truth really does matter. This is true even if a person does not realize how fully it affects the way he lives and thinks about reality.

### What Do Worldviews Influence?

Throughout this course, we have learned that worldviews influence every area of life. They influence how a person thinks and behaves, what they value and how they look at life. Let us now take a deeper, more detailed look at how worldviews influence every area of life.

First, we have learned that worldviews are the foundation of our understanding of reality. They are the very eyeglasses through which a person sees life. Worldviews establish how a person understands the nature of reality to be. This includes what they believe the origin and structure of the universe is. Worldviews help a person explain what higher beings exist like God or spirits or forces in nature. They help explain who man is, his purpose and destiny and how he should relate with others and with higher beings.

Let us reflect on this important aspect for a moment. A person's worldview helps him to understand how reality functions and holds together. This fundamental understanding of life then is very important to a person and is held with strong emotion. A person's worldview guides him in making sense of all the various things that happen in life. Think back to the story of Bawame and her uncle Asebei. In Asebei's worldview he believed that he was surrounded by many

different spirits, including ancestor spirits. He believed that the ancestor spirits had the power to heal. So the only way for Bawame to be healed was for Asebei to appeal to the ancestor spirits with offerings. That was the nature of reality as Asebei understood it and so he diligently behaved accordingly.

As we continue to learn about the nature of worldviews, it is important to understand that a worldview is a combination of many stories that form one all-encompassing story for understanding reality. One way to think about this would be to think of a spider web. A spider spins a web with many strands. The strands in the center of the web tend to be closer together than the others. But all the strands of the web are interconnected and hold the entire web together. The many strands of a spider web that form one complete web are like all the stories that combine to make up the one all-encompassing story a person believes about reality. Just as a spider web has strands in the center that are closer together, some stories and beliefs a person has are more important to how they view reality than others. For example, in the Bisorio worldview, though the Sun was the Creator, it was not as important in the everyday life of the Bisorios as were the various spirit beings that the Sun created. This was because the Bisorios believed that the spirits, not the Sun, played a vital role in the success of their daily lives. The beliefs regarding the spirits were like the strands closer to the center of the web. The belief about the Sun was not as close to the center of their worldview.

Just as the strands of the spider web are interconnected and hold the entire web together, so a worldview is the all-encompassing story of beliefs that is woven together and interconnected. Just as you cannot touch one single strand of a spider web without moving the entire web, you cannot address one single belief of a person's worldview without affecting the whole worldview. This is vital to understand as you minister at a worldview level. Knowing that a worldview is an all-encompassing story of beliefs that is woven together and interconnected will guide how you carry out your ministry. We will discuss this in more detail later. But for now let us carefully note that to effectively minister at a worldview we must come to understand the all-encompassing story of the people to whom we minister. We cannot address the worldviews of the people to whom we minister by only addressing their outward behavior.

Let us review the story of Caba. Caba went into the jungle to cut off the branches of the sago palm in order to restore harmony with Yu and thereby bring healing to his sick son. But do you remember what George did? George offered Caba medicine for his son thinking it would relieve the need for Caba to go into the jungle. But Caba still went. Do you remember why? It was because George was addressing only the outward behaviors of Caba's worldview. He did not understand that Caba's entire worldview involved a belief that he had to be in harmony with Yu in order to have his son healed. George did not address Caba's worldview beliefs and therefore did not see genuine worldview change.

Because a worldview is a combination of many stories and beliefs into one all-encompassing story that addresses all of reality, it is out of a person's worldview that he assumes his purpose and destiny. This includes his beliefs about death and the after-life.

Let us consider this important matter of purpose and destiny. As we considered in an earlier Lesson, the Bible clearly teaches that God created all men in His image. He created us humans as

personal beings who are to love Him and one another, living in harmonious relationships. Man is to come to know God through Christ and live unto Him while on earth. Man dies only one time and will give account before God. Those who have trusted Christ will live with Him forever in peace and harmonious joy. Those who do not know God through Christ will suffer eternal punishment for their sins, separated from God's presence forever. That is part of the urgent message from God's Word. We as Christians should be living our lives on earth accordingly.

However, many others do not accept God's Word and this view of reality. They do not accept the biblical worldview. They have a different worldview about reality because they accept others' stories from other sources. For example, many people believe that man is not created in God's image. They do not believe that man is a personal being. They do not believe man will give an account to God one day. In fact, they believe self is an illusion. They believe that man dies and is reborn many times until he eventually escapes this cycle through complete extinction of self. They live their lives on earth striving for this goal.

So again we see that the stories people accept as true and who they believe as telling the truth really does matter! It affects the way they live their lives on earth but it will also affect their eternal destiny! In a world of so many people claiming to be telling the truth, let us hold fast to the words of our precious Lord Jesus who said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" John 14:6.

#### **Most People Do Not Think About their Worldview**

We have discussed and described worldviews in great detail in this course. But how many people even realize that they have a worldview? Most people do not. In fact, worldviews are largely taken for granted and rarely examined. Before this course, you perhaps did not know what a worldview was and that each person has a worldview. This is because they are formed primarily by the stories we have heard and believed without judging them to be right or wrong. We have learned them informally through observing and listening to those around us as we grew up. In fact, just as a man with eyeglasses does not think about the fact that he is wearing eyeglasses to see better, most people are not even conscious of the worldviews through which they look at life!

Now this is important to understand. The fact that people without Christ have wrong worldviews and are not even aware of their worldview is a reflection of man's great need for God and His Word to teach them truth. Think about this for a moment as it applies even to us. God has taught us in His Word to live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. So it is very important that we examine our own lives to see if we are living by God's truth. We must examine our thoughts and our beliefs as well to see if they are true according to what God teaches us in His Word. As we learn the importance of measuring the truthfulness of our own worldview beliefs by God's Word, we will learn how to be better ministers to those who have never recognized their worldview beliefs in the first place. This takes us back to the issue that all worldviews have an authoritative source. Our worldviews must have God and His Word alone as our authoritative source in order to be true and honoring to Him.

#### **How Worldviews Are Passed On and The Need to Minister at a Worldview Level**

This Lesson will continue to examine the nature of worldview. We will further consider and reflect on how a worldview affects what people value and how they live their lives in their own society. We will also examine how worldviews are passed along within a society and consider the spiritual battle we are in as we seek to tell others the Good News of Christ.

### How Worldviews are Passed On

Now let us consider how worldviews are passed on to others. You have learned that there is a very close relationship between worldview formation and stories. And so the stories that people tell and listen to really do matter! Remember, God has designed his creation primarily to live in harmonious relationships with Him and with one another. Good stories are a powerful and effective means of communicating and relating to one another. We have learned that many of the stories people hear and believe actually shape their understanding of reality.

Remember, all peoples have stories about the nature of reality: the origin of the earth, where man came from, what gods and spirits exist, the origin of death, where thunder and lightning come from, what happens to people after death and many other such things. All of these stories about the nature of reality combine together to form a basic understanding of reality. Together they form one big, all-compassing story that forms a person's understanding of reality, the worldview eyeglasses through which he views all of life. This all-encompassing story about reality helps a person understand who they are, where they came from, what spirits or beings exist, how they should relate to people or spirit beings, what happens when a person dies and what life means. This story helps a person interpret and relate to all the things that happen in his life.

So how are worldviews passed on? They are passed on by the very same means by which they are formed—through stories! The stories that make up the foundation of a person's worldview and the means by which they were told in the first place is the same way that worldviews are passed on from one generation to another and from one people to another. Reflect on that for a moment. People tell stories to one another very frequently. Now when those stories are the stories that shape a person's worldview, they are passing on their very worldview. For example, when a Bisorio grandfather tells his grandson how he must cut a sago palm down in order to stay in harmony with Yu, he is passing on his worldview belief that Yu exists and must be appeased in order to have good health. The Bisorio grandfather is passing on his worldview beliefs by telling a story to his grandson.

But telling stories is not the only way worldviews are passed on. Now, remember in the last Lesson we learned how the stories that shape a people's worldview strongly influence what they value and how they live together in their society. This is very important to note because it is a vital part of how worldviews are passed on. When people practice their customs together and reinforce their worldview beliefs as a community, they are passing on their story about how they believe the nature of reality to be. Indeed, they are acting out and living out the stories that shape their worldview beliefs.

So stories are not just oral communication from one person to another. Stories are lived out in society by experiencing relationships, feeling emotions, treasuring values and practicing customs in a way that demonstrates what people believe about the nature of reality and how life ought to

be lived. Stories are very powerful. They reinforce and affirm a people's worldview as they are told and lived out. They are the very means by which worldviews are passed on from one person to another, from one generation to another.

### The Ga People

Let us now listen to a story about a people group called the Ga people to learn how worldview beliefs are passed on by stories. We will also again examine how the Ga people's worldview strongly influences what they value, what they feel and how they live their lives in the context of their society.

Many years ago, the Ga people migrated to a new land looking for fertile soil. They were farmers and they wanted to find land that would be suitable for agriculture. According to Ga oral tradition, as they were migrating to their new land, a severe famine broke out among the people. The rains had stopped and there was very little food to nourish the people. Many of the Ga people died. But the Ga people did not succumb to the famine. Instead, they were inspired by the famine to beseech the blessing of the gods on their farming efforts. As they appealed to their gods, they tried massive food production methods. Eventually, these methods yielded them an enormous harvest. When the harvest finally arrived and food became plentiful, the people were so happy that they celebrated with a festival that ridiculed hunger and praised their gods for the blessing of the harvest. This festival came to be known as "homowo," which means "jeering at hunger."

Every year, before the rainy season starts in May, when the Ga people are planting their crops, homowo begins. It continues until the harvest in August, when the Ga priests designate a date for the grand celebration. When August arrives, every Ga person is required by traditional law to return to the home of his or her father for the celebration of the homowo festival. Multitudes of people arrive from the outlying villages with much excitement and carrying harvested crops of all kinds. At midnight on the night before the designated homowo festival day, a gun is fired to signal that no one else is allowed to enter the city. This begins the actual homowo festival.

Early in the morning, the Ga people begin preparing food for the celebration. After all the food has been prepared, the people make their way around the city and sprinkle food on the shrines of various gods. They believe that the gods are to be honored by eating before their ancestors or living humans. Next, the Ga people present food offerings both inside and outside of their houses to their dead ancestors, inviting them to join this festival. The people pray to the ancestors, asking them to watch over their families, to keep them healthy and to protect them from misfortune. After the gods and ancestors have eaten, the people eat their own meal in the home of their father.

Even as they eat their meal in their fathers' homes, the Ga people have an order of who must eat first. The priest is the first person to eat. Wearing white clothing that signifies purity, peace and harmony, he offers a sacrifice to his god. He entreats the god to protect them in the coming year and grant them a good harvest. Finally, the people eat. Many of them are dressed in red as a symbol of aggression against hunger. As they enter the new year of harvest, their clothing signifies that the war against hunger has begun. Any remaining corn from the harvest is cooked



and eaten. They do not leave anything from the harvest to enter the new year. If the harvest has been plentiful, the feast is massive and the Ga people will consume an enormous amount of food.

After the people have eaten during the homowo festival, the next day there is much visiting from house to house. It is a joyous time of being together as a community. People make peace with one another. Offenses, such as adultery and theft, that have not been settled during the previous year are now forgiven. They drink and celebrate together, strengthening their unity as a community. This is a new beginning for everything—both for harvest and for relationships.

The homowo festival marks the end of the harvest and officially starts the new agricultural year. The Ga people leave the festival with much hope and excitement, greeting one another with the cry, “Take life, take life. May the year’s end meet us, may we live to be old, may no black cat cross between us, at the end of the year may we sit again.”

### The Worldview of the Ga People

We can see from the story of the Ga people that their worldview strongly influences what they value, the emotions they feel and how they live together within their society. The Ga people believe in gods that can give them good harvests in the year to come. By celebrating homowo together in the proper way, they believe they are able to entreat the gods to give them good harvests in the next year.

The worldview of the Ga people strongly influences the values they hold. They deeply value celebrating homowo in the correct way. All the people have to arrive into the homes of their fathers by a certain time, the gods and ancestors must be fed before anyone eats, and even as the people eat, the priests have to eat first to ask for the blessing of the gods for the new year’s harvest.

The Ga people also strongly value new beginnings. During the homowo festival, they not only begin a new year of harvest, but they also begin a new year of relationships with one another by forgiving grievances of the past year. This is deeply important to them. Consider carefully how their worldview strongly influenced how they felt, how they interacted with one another as a community and even how they restored broken relationships.

The homowo celebration of the Ga people is an incredible gathering and practice of the beliefs they share as a people. It is held with great emotion—full of excitement and hope for what the new year’s harvest might be. As the people celebrate together with great joy and participate in the rituals of homowo, their bonds of relationship are strengthened and their worldview beliefs are reinforced—even if they do not realize it.

Through their celebration of homowo each year, the Ga people are also passing on their worldview beliefs to their children and grandchildren. As the younger generations learn how to participate in homowo, they learn that there are gods to be entreated for a successful harvest. In practicing the homowo rituals, they learn the story of homowo. The children and grandchildren also learn the values and customs as they watch and participate with their elders.

So we can also see from this story how aspects of the Ga people's worldview are passed on to the next generations by words, emotions and deeds in the context of their relationships with one another. This is a very important truth about the nature of worldview that we must learn well.

### The Battle of Ministering at a Worldview Level

In the last two Lessons, we have learned that a worldview is very powerful. It is held with deep emotions because it addresses a people's understanding of reality and their place and purpose in that reality. It goes to the very core of their identity and meaningfulness as a people. We have seen this in the story of the Anlo people and how they honored the city god of Atito as a community. We have also seen the strong emotions and bonds between the Ga people in their homowo celebration of harvest. You, too, will find that as you minister to people, their worldviews will be held with great emotion even though they may not realize it. Just like the Anlo and the Ga people, they will understand reality and themselves as a people in relation to their worldview beliefs.

It will not be easy to minister to others at a worldview level. We truly need the wisdom, grace and power of our Lord Jesus. Only He can enable us to minister at a worldview level. There will be a great struggle in ministry as God uses you to speak truth to the very foundational beliefs of those you serve. This great struggle will be because people live their lives based on their worldview. What they value, how they understand themselves as a people, and how they live in their society are strongly bound to their worldview. Therefore let us note well that worldview change for people does not come easily. It typically is met with strong resistance. In fact, some people would rather die for their beliefs than change them, because somehow they believe that even in death, their beliefs become meaningful.

God our Father is fully aware that worldview change for people does not come easily. In fact, He tells us in His Word through the apostle Paul about ministering at a worldview level. In regards to ministering in a world of many false beliefs, Paul said, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

Indeed, we are in a war! God is telling us that people's worldview beliefs are like fortresses! And so as we address the very core beliefs of people who do not have God and His Word as their authority, we will be fighting a battle that involves the need to destroy worldview fortresses. They will not be destroyed easily because they involve people's very identity and what they believe to be true about reality. But the stories that shape the worldviews of those who do not believe in God and His Son, Jesus, are stories that go against God's Story. Remember, only God's Word can tell people what is true. Only God's Word is the ultimate authority to know what is true and right. The stories that people tell and listen to that do not have God's Word as their authoritative source are not true and cannot shape a biblical worldview.

This is a very important matter. There are many different worldviews among the peoples of the world. There are many different stories proclaiming to tell the truth about the nature of reality, including who man is, how he should live and what his destiny is.

But let us as Christians remember the words of Jesus, the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. He taught us that, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" Matthew 4:4. In saying those powerful words, our Lord is teaching us that all men must live by God's Word. God has called us to go forth to a very needy world to proclaim the Good News of His Son to all those who have not yet heard of His wonderful salvation from sins and eternal life with Him. Yes, the Story of the Good News of God's Son must be proclaimed to all men everywhere. So though we are in a strong battle for the souls of men, let us go forth with confidence, not in ourselves, but in our great Lord Jesus who has said, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age" Matthew 28:18-20.

## Review

Let us now review what we have learned in this Lesson.

We have learned that worldview beliefs are passed on from one generation to another and from one people to another through stories. These stories can be told orally from one person to another. These stories can also be passed on by the rituals and customs people practice together as a community. By practicing the customs that reinforce the values and beliefs of a people's worldview, the people are actually passing on the story of their worldview.

We also listened to a story about the Ga people. We learned how their worldview beliefs that the gods could be entreated through the homowo festival would give them a plentiful harvest in the new year. We learned that as they celebrated homowo together with great joy and hope, they reinforced and strengthened their worldview beliefs. We also saw how the worldview of the Ga people was passed on to the next generations as the children celebrated with the adults and learned the rituals of homowo.

Finally, we have learned that ministering to others at a worldview level will not be an easy task. Challenging a person's worldview with the truth of God's Word will be a battle. This is because what people value, how they understand themselves as a people, and how they live in their society is strongly bound to their worldview. We will truly need God's wisdom and grace to minister to others at the worldview level.

As you continue to reflect and consider how worldviews influence every aspect of life, try to discover an aspect of the worldview of a person who is not a Christian. Begin your discovery by observing a specific practice or custom. Perhaps it is a religious custom or a practice they do to heal a sick person or to predict the future. Consider the relationships, human or spirit being, that they are deeply valuing and seeking to honor by this practice. What do they hope to attain by this

practice? What emotions do they express related to this practice—joy, reverence, fear, or a combination of all three? What is the story about the nature of reality from which this practice has come? How would you describe the challenge of addressing this non-Christian belief and practice? Do you think it would be difficult or easy?

As you keep learning, keep your hope in your Lord and Teacher, Jesus Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” Colossians 2:3. Rejoice in the fact that He will keep teaching you and enabling you to be effective ministers for His glory, ministering at a worldview level!

In the next lesson, to keep sharpening our skills and understanding, we will review all that we have learned in the course so far about this crucial matter of worldview.

## **Lesson Six**

### **Reflecting on Worldviews within your Culture**

As we've been learning in previous lessons, every culture has foundational worldviews that affect their patterns of relationships, activities, and behaviors. In this lesson, rather than taking time to teach, we will take some time to reflect on worldviews you will encounter in your own culture.

As you go out to witness about the Lord Jesus Christ in your culture, you will meet people who are surprised that you talk about God. Why is this the case? Because they have been taught in school that God does not exist and that all things came into being through evolution. They believe that no educated person believes in God. This is a worldview that came through their cultural and educational development.

If people believe there is no God, how will this affect their behavior? If you look at Romans 1:18-32 you will see what happens progressively in human society when God is rejected:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, *have been clearly perceived*, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed *forever!* Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

Because of the laws of God built into man's heart (Rom. 2:14-15) societies generally resist such kinds of behavior. People know these things are wrong. Values in society generally come from the pressures of a society that lets them know how they are expected to live. However, each society has different standards of right and wrong. For example, a tribe in East Africa takes pride in being skilled at theft without being caught. The first drink a newborn baby receives should be stolen milk so that the baby will be a good thief. Other cultures would be shocked at that. But, without God's Word, the Bible, to be an objective authority on what is right or wrong, cultural worldviews are not a good guide for life. Because their moral values do not come from God through the Bible, every society increasingly experiences moral decline.

Now let's do some thinking about our own society. If your honorable teacher thinks it the best thing to do, break into groups of 4 or 5, choose 2 or 3 belief areas, and discuss these belief areas together. Then, at the end of the session, have a general group discussion on these beliefs, allowing each group to give input from what they had discussed.

For each chosen belief area ...

1. define the belief
2. identify the source of where that belief comes from (worldview),
3. what the effects of that belief are in moral living, behavior, and activities, and
4. what the Bible says about that belief and those behaviors and what the Biblical worldview is.

<b>Belief defined</b>	<b>Source of that Belief</b>	<b>Effects of that belief</b>	<b>God's Word</b>
Where man came from			
Ancestor worship			
Marriage			
Role of the Husband			
Role of the Wife			
Who is honored			
Leadership Authority			
Sin			
What is righteous			
Work			
Money			
Saving Face			
Speaking truth			
Sickness/health			

Imagine that you are going to teach a new believer biblical standards about one of these areas. He or she still holds to the secular or religious view that you discussed above. Answer the following questions:

1. What would need to be taught from the Bible?
2. What Bible stories (or other stories) would you use to speak to the worldview level?

Finally, if you have opportunity to get out of the classroom observe how non-Christian children and parents relate to each other. What important relationships do you discover that the non-Christian is seeking to honor and maintain by these practices? What values does this person have in relation to this practice? What emotions are expressed? What is the story about the nature of reality that shapes this person's practice? How does this practice affect his identity among his people in his culture?

If you are able to do this, after you meet back together discuss this with others in the class. What was the worldview expressed? How will these affect how the church functions? What values are Biblical and which are not biblical, needing to be transformed by the Word of God?

As you continue to reflect on all that we are learning about worldviews and how to be effective ministers of the Gospel, continue to pray that God would give you understanding and clarity. Pray that He would open your minds to gain wisdom and that He would help you as you discover your own worldview and the worldview of others.

In the next two Lessons, we will consider how worldview change takes place. These next Lessons are very important in further understanding the spiritual battle we are in and how, in the midst of that battle, we can be wise and loving messengers of God's Word.

## **Lesson Seven**

### **Ministering for Worldview Change**

In this Lesson and the next, we will be learning more about ministering for worldview change and what God teaches us about ministering at a worldview level. But first, let us review what we have been learning about the very important matter of worldview.

In the past few Lessons, we have been learning more about the nature of worldviews and how they profoundly influence all aspects of life. Through the story of the Anlo people, we learned that a people's worldview strongly influences their values and the way they live within their culture and society. The Anlo people believe the nature of reality consists of the sky-god Mawu-Lisa who created the trowo deities to interact with humans. We learned that the Anlo people deeply value pleasing the trowo in order to have health and prosperity in their lives. They set up a festival to honor the city god of Atito and they sacrificed blood offerings to appease him. By doing this together as a community, they strengthen their identity as a group and as individuals, knowing that their practices are for the good of the entire people group. The Anlo people hold their beliefs with great emotion and as they carry out their customs together, their worldview assumptions are strengthened.

We have also learned how worldviews are passed on from one generation to another and from one people to another. Do you remember the story of the Ga people? The homowo celebration of the Ga people is an incredible gathering and practice of the beliefs they share as a people. It is held with great emotion—full of excitement and hope for what the new year's harvest might be. As the people celebrate together with great joy and participate in the rituals of homowo, their bonds of relationship are strengthened and their worldview beliefs are reinforced—even if they do not realize it. Through their celebration of homowo each year, the Ga people are also passing on their worldview beliefs to their children and grandchildren. As the younger generations learn how to participate in homowo, they learn that there are gods to be entreated for a successful harvest. In practicing the homowo rituals, they learn the story of homowo. The children and grandchildren also learn the values and customs as they watch and participate with their elders. So we can also see from this story how aspects of the Ga people's worldview are passed on to the next generations by words, emotions and deeds in the context of their relationships with one another.

We have also learned that there will be a real battle as we minister to others at a worldview level. Why is this? It is because worldviews involve people's very identity and what they believe to be true about reality. Remember, the apostle Paul said, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. As we address the very core beliefs of people who do not have God and His Word as their authority, we will be fighting a spiritual battle that involves the need to destroy worldview fortresses. There will be great resistance to worldview change because people live their lives based on their worldview. What they value, how they understand themselves as a people, and how they live in their society are strongly bound to their worldview.



Keep in mind that the stories that shape the worldviews of those who do not believe in God and His Son, Jesus, are stories that go against God's Story. Remember, only God's Word can tell people what is true. Only God's Word is the ultimate authority to know what is true and right. The stories that people tell and listen to that do not have God's Word as their authoritative source are not true and cannot shape a biblical worldview.

Let us now look more closely at the resistance we will encounter as we minister to others at that worldview level.

### Resistance to Worldview Change

As we consider the need to minister to others with the goal of worldview change, we must be aware of the strong resistance that we will face. More importantly, we need to understand why we will face such strong resistance from people who do not have a biblical worldview. Think for a moment of all the things that will be challenged by God's Word when a person's worldview is challenged. We have learned that a worldview is the way a person looks at reality. So a person's very understanding of the nature of reality will be challenged. His understanding of who he is as an individual as well as who he is within his society will be challenged. The gods and spirit beings he believes exist and the very purpose and the meaning of life as he understands it will be challenged. When these foundational beliefs are challenged, the deep values he holds and the rituals and customs he practices will in turn be challenged. Indeed, a person's entire world and being will be shaken when his foundational worldview beliefs about reality are questioned.

So we can see that ministering to others at a worldview level will indeed be a great spiritual battle. How we need our Lord's power, grace and wisdom! Satan and other evil spirit beings lead people astray through wrong stories that form wrong worldviews! As the Scriptures teach us in so many biblical stories and as is so clearly said by Paul, "For if the gospel we preach is hidden, it is hidden only from those who are being lost. They do not believe, because their minds have been kept in the dark by the evil god of this world. He keeps them from seeing the light shining on them, the light that comes from the Good News about the glory of Christ" 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.

As we have learned, all people hold to their worldview with great emotion. So there will be a deep emotional resistance to worldview change. The battle against the emotional resistance is only waged effectively by the power of the very One who has called us to go into all the world and preach the Good News! We must continually look to Him for wisdom and grace as we minister to others at a worldview level against the strongholds of this world!

### The Barrier of People's Values, Practices and Identity

When we minister to others at the worldview level, we will encounter a battle long before we ever address their actual worldview beliefs. Remember, the values and practices that develop out of people's worldviews actually reinforce their worldview beliefs. As people express their values and practice their customs together within their community, it shapes and strengthens their identity, their allegiances and their sense of belonging to one another. So their values and

practices will be a great barrier before ever addressing worldview beliefs. Let us carefully note that in many societies there is a great cost to those who hear God's Good News of Christ and believe on Him. When individuals believe on Christ and then desire to live according to a biblical worldview in their society they are often severely persecuted and ostracized from their communities. This is because they are seen as going against the values, practices, customs and even the very identity of their people.

Today in the country of Israel there is a man named Yesuel. He experienced this persecution and ostracism from his own family. Three years ago, Yesuel heard God's Good News and believed on Christ. His family practices Judaism and does not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, God's promised Redeemer. They believe, much like the Pharisees of Jesus' day that their lineage to Abraham and their religious practices earn them the righteousness to stand before God. They practice their beliefs as a community. Their family members make up much of the town in which they live—more than a thousand people! When Yesuel became a Christian, he realized that many of the religious rituals were not honoring to God. Because he wanted to honor the Lord he would no longer participate with his family and community. Therefore Yesuel's family was very angry and upset with him. They told him he was no longer welcome in their town and in their homes. His own parents would not let him in their home and forced him to move to another town! Because Yesuel had trusted Christ and began to honorably live according to a biblical worldview, he was ostracized from his own family.

### Rival Stories

It is important to remember that the values and customs that people hold and practice develop from their worldview. Remember, there is an all-encompassing story of reality that shapes these values and customs. Just like the worldview story of Mawu-Lisa and the city god of Aitito shaped the Anlo custom of sacrificing animals and pouring blood on the tree trunk, so all worldview stories shape the values and customs of a people. Remember, stories that do not have God and His Word as their authoritative source do not lead to a biblical worldview. These stories are rival stories to God and His Story to us. A rival story is a worldview story that challenges and opposes God's Word. A rival story challenges God's testimony regarding what is true about the nature of reality: who God is, who man is, what spirits exist, what man's purpose is, what sin is, how sin is forgiven, what happens to man after death and many other such aspects of reality. This is a very important matter because a rival story—a wrong worldview—will keep people blind in their understanding and hinder them from ever finding forgiveness and eternal life in Christ!

One example of a rival worldview story declares that God is not an eternal, personal being, but rather an eternal, impersonal force. It teaches that man is not a personal being created in God's image for the purpose of knowing and loving God. Instead this story teaches that man, as an actual individual self, is only an illusion—people do not exist as individual selves. This story does not teach that man dies only once and then must give an account of his life to God. Instead it teaches that man dies and is reborn many times until he eventually escapes the cycle of death and rebirth and the consciousness of self is extinguished. People who believe this rival story live out their daily lives on earth striving for this goal.

Let us carefully note that such a rival story opposes the truth of God's Word and actually leads people away from their need of Christ! This is because a rival story changes the basic understanding of God and man. Therefore, it also changes the understanding of what sin really is, what man's real need is and what his destiny without Christ really is. As you can see, because it opposes the truth of God's Word, a rival story is a very serious matter! We truly need our Lord's wisdom and grace in discerning a rival story and knowing how to lovingly speak His truth to those who have such a worldview.

### What is Really True?

As we continue to learn about ministering at a worldview level, it is very important for us to note that a people's values and customs are not unnecessary or evil in and of themselves. For example, marriage is not unnecessary or wrong. Neither are laws, economy, music, arts or many other institutions in a society. However, if they are not rooted in God's Word, that is, if they are developed out of a false worldview that does not have God's truth as the authoritative source, they are not in harmony with a biblical worldview. When people have a false worldview, many of their practices and customs emerge from a wrong understanding of reality. If they do not correctly understand who God is, who man is, what the meaning and purpose of life is, many of their actions and practices will be erroneous.

Let us carefully consider this truth. For example, the truck driver in the story of Correa wrongly believes in the existence of a popular saint called Correa and regularly offers her water sacrifices, praying to her, thanking her and believing she can provide for his needs. But in reality what is the truth? Is it Correa who provides for his needs? No, it is God alone who provides for his needs.

Recall the story of the Bisorio man named Caba. Caba also erroneously thought that he had to stay in harmony with a force called Yu in order to have health for his family. And yet we know from God's Word that it is God alone from whom man—including Caba and his family—has his health. As God's Word clearly says, "He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things" and He "gives food to all flesh, for His lovingkindness is everlasting" (Acts 17:25 and Psalm 136:25).

Consider the Anlo people again. They wrongly believe in Mawu-Lisa and the trowo deities and live their lives in fear and submission to them. They believe the city god of Atito provides them with good catches of fish and prosperity. Yet it is God alone who provides them with good catches of fish and prosperity.

And do you remember what the Ga people believed? They wrongly praise false deities for their harvest when it is God alone who provides all creatures—including the Ga people—with life and breath and everything else!

Even the Pharisees who were supposed to know God's law better than anyone else wrongly believed that they could attain eternal life by the good deeds they did. But was that the truth? No,

the truth was that only by faith in Christ's death, burial and resurrection does a person have eternal life!

So we can see from all the examples we have heard throughout this course that it may be the case that people's social and cultural practices, customs and relationships actually reinforce and affirm a false worldview, which is "raised up against the knowledge of God." In other words, these false practices and wrong worldviews are in opposition to God and His Word. The Lord of Lords and the King of Kings cannot and does not accept these things.

As we lovingly minister to others, we will need God's wisdom and grace to know how to address the wrong worldview beliefs people have. It is vital that we learn how to wisely, patiently and lovingly address their worldview beliefs before we try to address the practices and values that are developed out of those worldview beliefs.

### Jesus and Nicodemus

It is vital to note that we cannot try to bring about genuine change by only addressing the values and customs of a people who do not start with God and His Story. Let us now learn from the example of our Lord Jesus who ministered to others by addressing their very worldview.

First, let us carefully consider how Jesus responded to a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Remember, the Pharisees greatly resisted Jesus. Jesus tried many times to speak to the Pharisees and address their worldview. He tried to teach them the truth. But they did not listen. In fact, they even tried to kill Him!

Nicodemus held the values and practiced the customs that were expected of a good Pharisee. He put his faith in being a descendant of Abraham and in keeping the Law, fasting, giving tithes and giving alms to the poor. However, Nicodemus was different from the other Pharisees because he wanted to listen to what Jesus had to say. He actually went to find Jesus to ask Him some questions about eternal life.

Now listen carefully to what Nicodemus asked Jesus and how Jesus answered him. This story comes from the Gospel of John, Chapter three.

There was a Jewish leader named Nicodemus, who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. One night he went to Jesus and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God. No one could perform the miracles you are doing unless God were with him."

Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again." John 3:1-3

Now let us pause here and reflect carefully on how Jesus interacted with Nicodemus. Jesus knew what Nicodemus's worldview was. He knew that though Nicodemus believed man was sinful, he wrongly trusted in being a descendant of Abraham to gain favor with God. Jesus knew that Nicodemus also wrongly believed that he could gain God's favor and even attain eternal life by

the things he did—trying to obey God’s law, giving money to the poor, fasting and many other such things.

Jesus knew that Nicodemus had a wrong worldview and so He purposely talked with Nicodemus at the worldview level. He did not address the things that Nicodemus did, but rather Jesus talked to him about the very nature of what Nicodemus believed reality to be. Specifically, Jesus addressed what Nicodemus wrongly believed to be the nature of man’s relationship to God. He loved Nicodemus and wanted him to understand the true nature of man’s relationship with God. He wanted Nicodemus to understand that in order to enter the kingdom of God, he must properly understand reality—God, himself and the nature of the relationship between God and man. Otherwise, Jesus knew that Nicodemus would never enter the kingdom of God. So in speaking to his worldview Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again, spiritually born of God in order to enter God’s kingdom. Entering God’s kingdom called for a new birth. Man is so great a sinner that he needs a new birth, a spiritual birth from above! Without a spiritual birth from God no man can enter into God’s kingdom.

Nicodemus responded to Jesus telling him that he had to be born again by saying, “How can a grown man be born again?” Nicodemus asked. “He certainly cannot enter his mother’s womb and be born a second time!”

“I am telling you the truth,” replied Jesus, “that no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. A person is born physically of human parents, but is born spiritually of the Spirit. Do not be surprised because I tell you that you must all be born again. The wind blows wherever it wishes; you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” “How can this be?” asked Nicodemus.

Jesus asked, “You are a great teacher in Israel, and you don’t know this?” (John 3:1-10)

Let us further carefully reflect on this encounter between Nicodemus and the Lord Jesus. Nicodemus was aware that this teaching of Jesus was very different than what he and the other religious leaders taught. In fact, during the days when Jesus lived on earth, non-Jews who wanted to follow the Jewish religion were washed completely with water and given new clothes to wear as a symbol of being cleaned. Those who were Jews by birth believed that from birth they were sons of Abraham and thus children of God by covenant.

But when Jesus spoke about a new birth, He was talking about something completely different. He was not talking about an outward washing and putting on new clothes. He was not even talking about whether or not someone was related to Abraham by birth or not. Rather, Jesus was speaking about an inner cleansing and a new birth by the Spirit of God. This was the true understanding of reality that Nicodemus needed. He needed to clearly understand that he was a sinner in absolute and desperate need and nothing could help him other than a new birth and cleansing by God’s Spirit through faith in Christ. Nicodemus truly needed a new worldview understanding and so Jesus spoke to him accordingly.

Nicodemus was considered a great teacher among the Jews. He had been teaching others that they could earn righteousness through their outward deeds and by being related to Abraham. But this was wrong! He himself had a wrong worldview and he was teaching this wrong worldview to others. He had been listening to and telling the wrong stories! He had not been listening to God's Word alone. The Lord Jesus lovingly tried to help him by speaking to his worldview and addressing his understanding of the nature of reality, including his view of himself and his relationship to God.

The story of Nicodemus is a very important example to us as we minister to others. Jesus did not address Nicodemus's values and customs as a Pharisee in order to change his worldview. He addressed his very worldview beliefs! To effectively minister God's truth to others we must, like Jesus did, minister at the worldview level. Remember, the worldview beliefs shape the values and customs people hold and practice. If we do not ultimately address the worldview beliefs, we will never address the very reason why people live and relate to all of life the way that they do.

### Lesson Review

Let us review what we have learned in this Lesson.

First, we learned that ministering to others at a worldview level will be a great spiritual battle. People hold to their worldviews with great emotion and so there will be strong resistance as we minister at the worldview level. There will be a barrier even as people express their values and practice their customs together with their community. Changing a worldview involves changing the fundamental beliefs that strongly influence who people understand themselves to be and why they do what they do. We truly need our Lord's power, grace and wisdom as we attempt to minister at a worldview level!

Secondly, we learned that there are rival stories that challenge and oppose God and His Word. They challenge God's testimony regarding what is true about the nature of reality. A rival story proclaims a different understanding of God and man than that which is declared in God's Word. Therefore, it also proclaims a different understanding of what sin really is, what man's real need is and what his destiny without Christ really is. A rival worldview story that stands in opposition to God's Word is a very serious matter. With our Lord's help, we must learn to discern a rival story and learn how to lovingly speak God's truth to those who believe these rival stories.

We also learned that when people have a false worldview, many of their practices and customs emerge from a wrong understanding of reality. If they do not correctly understand who God is, who man is, what the meaning and purpose of life is, many of their actions and practices will be erroneous.

Finally, we learned the importance of addressing a person's worldview from the story of Nicodemus. Jesus did not address Nicodemus's customs and practices as a Pharisee in order to change his worldview. Rather, Jesus spoke directly to Nicodemus's worldview beliefs about God, himself and man's relationship to God. He wanted Nicodemus to clearly understand that he was a sinner in absolute and desperate need of God's grace. Nothing—not his lineage to Abraham nor his religious practices—could help him enter the kingdom of God. Only a new

birth and cleansing by God's Spirit through faith in Christ would enable him to enter God's kingdom. Jesus truly addressed Nicodemus's worldview beliefs.

We also must learn how to address the worldview beliefs of those who have wrong worldviews. In the next Lesson, we will be learning about the ways in which God works to bring about worldview change in the hearts and minds of people.

Assignment: Discuss the following...

1. When you go into Han culture to share the Gospel what are the areas of greatest resistance to the message? Illustrate with some stories.
2. What are the areas hardest for Han Chinese to understand? Illustrate with some stories.
3. To what extent do healings, deliverance ministry, and answered prayer cut through the worldview barriers? If these are important, what in the worldview of the people do they change? (Things such as the reality of God, the power of God, the compassion of God, etc. What other things?)
4. What kinds of teaching or stories help change Han Chinese worldviews to being able to understand and respond to the Gospel?

## **Lesson Eight**

### **How Worldviews Change**

In this Lesson, we will be learning about the context in which worldview change takes place and the ways in which God works to bring about worldview change. But first, let us review what we learned in the last Lesson.

In the last Lesson, we learned that there are rival stories that challenge and oppose God and His Word. They challenge God's testimony regarding what is true about the nature of reality. A rival story changes the biblical understanding of God and man. Therefore, it also changes the biblical understanding of what sin really is, what man's real need is and what his destiny without Christ really is. We must learn to discern a rival story and learn how to lovingly speak God's truth to those who believe these rival stories.

We also learned that when people have a false worldview, many of their practices and customs emerge from a wrong understanding of reality. If they do not correctly understand who God is, who man is, what the meaning and purpose of life is, many of their actions and practices will be erroneous. Though various practices and customs may outwardly appear to be wise, humble and righteous, it does not mean that they are in harmony with what God's Word says is true and right.

Finally, we learned the importance of addressing a person's worldview from the story of Nicodemus. Jesus did not address Nicodemus's customs and practices as a Pharisee in order to change his worldview. Rather, Jesus spoke directly to Nicodemus's worldview beliefs about God, himself and man's relationship to God. He wanted Nicodemus to clearly understand that he was a sinner in absolute and desperate need of God's grace. Nothing—not his lineage to Abraham nor his religious practices—could help him enter the kingdom of God. Only a new birth and cleansing by God's Spirit through faith in Christ would enable him to enter God's kingdom. Jesus truly addressed Nicodemus's worldview beliefs.

Now let us carefully consider the context in which worldview change takes place.

#### **Informal Learning and Worldview Change**

As we consider the context in which worldview change takes place, let us first be reminded how worldviews are formed and passed on in the first place. We have learned that worldviews are both formed and passed on from one person to another and from one generation to the next through stories. Now remember, these stories can be told orally from one person to another. But this is not the only way worldview stories are learned. Worldview stories can also be learned by experiencing relationships, feeling emotions, treasuring values and practicing customs in a way that demonstrates what people believe about the nature of reality and how life ought to be lived.

When people learn worldview stories in this way, they often do not realize they are learning anything at all. The development and acceptance of their worldview is largely unconscious and takes place informally. The means by which a worldview story is first formed and passed on is also the means by which worldview change will take place: stories communicated orally and



through participation in community life in an informal way. So let us carefully note this important truth: the informal means by which a worldview is formed in the first place is the very same means by which worldview change occurs.

Let us further carefully consider the informal way in which worldviews are formed so that we can better understand how worldview change will occur. When worldviews are formed, they are not learned in a formal, educational setting. People do not study different worldviews and then decide which one they want to view reality through. No, worldviews are formed in the informal setting of everyday life. People's worldviews are developed from the very beginning of childhood as they listen to stories, as they experience relationships, as they feel emotions and practice customs within their community. Their worldviews are formed through what they hear and see modeled and through interaction and imitation of what they hear and see.

Just as most people are unaware of what their worldview is, most people learn their worldview unknowingly. They do not consciously recognize as they hear a story or practice a cultural custom that their worldview beliefs are being developed. Let us consider a few examples to illustrate how most learning takes place and how worldviews develop unconsciously and informally.

First, let us consider a child learning his mother tongue. An infant child does not sit in educational courses to learn how to speak to his mother and father. No, a child learns his mother tongue by listening to the sounds his parents and other family members make and eventually imitating their words. The child is not aware that he is learning a language—he unconsciously is learning how to communicate in the same way that his family does.

Here is another illustration of how learning takes place informally. Consider a Bisorio son who is watching his father make a dugout canoe. As his father carves the canoe, the son watches how he digs out the inside of the tree and shapes it into a canoe for the water. At the front of the canoe, the father carves a crocodile head and the son learns that this is to protect them from malicious water spirits as they travel the river. So not only is the son learning how to make a canoe as he observes and participates with his father, his worldview beliefs about the spirit world are also being developed.

Consider one more illustration. The burial practices of the Kipsigis people of Kenya, Africa provide another good example of how learning takes place informally. The Kipsigis people believe spirits of the dead eventually come back to live in bodies of future generations. So when a father dies, he is laid to rest and before the grave is covered with dirt, the oldest son throws grass into the open grave. This is a final blessing on his father. The son says, "Go safely, Father, we will soon call you to come back to us." Those who are watching and listening to this burial ritual learn an aspect of worldview belief—what the Kipsigis believe about reality. They learn to believe that their ancestors keep living and never really die and that living relatives can call back dead ancestors to live in the bodies of another generation. Their hope is tied to being reborn again and continuing to live on earth.

So we can see from these examples that most things are learned and that worldviews are formed informally and unconsciously. In fact, worldviews are much like the air we breathe. The air we

breathe is very important and yet most of the time we breathe in and out thousands of times a day without thinking about it. In the same way, though worldviews strongly influence the way we think about reality and live our lives, most of us don't think about the fact that we have a worldview!

As we prepare to minister to others, we must understand this important truth. Most learning takes place informally. This includes learning a worldview. So as people's worldviews are formed, it largely happens unconsciously and in an informal context. It will be very important for you to learn the informal means by which worldviews are learned among the people whom you serve. Learning this will help to guide your ministry strategies for worldview change because it will give you insight into how their worldview is formed in the first place.

### Trusted Relationships and Worldview Change

We have just learned that worldviews are developed primarily by informal means. But how does this informal learning take place? Most informal learning takes place as people relate to others whom they trust and value. Remember, God created us to live in harmonious relationship with one another. It is very appropriate that people learn in the context of trusted relationships because God designed us to live that way. These relationships include those between a person and his parents, siblings, extended family members, friends, peers and community leaders. As a person interacts with those whom he trusts, he learns worldview beliefs and values.

We have already learned that people hold their worldviews with deep emotion because they involve people's very identity and what they believe to be true about reality. The worldview learning that takes place in the context of trusted and valued relationships is also held with deep emotion. This is because the relationships through which worldviews are learned informally are very important to those who are learning. People are not learning their worldview beliefs from those of whom they are suspicious—like strangers. Rather, they are learning from those whom they trust and value.

Think about things you have learned in your life. In your childhood, from whom did you learn? Was it not from loved ones? For example, you learned what is right and wrong from your parents and other family members. Perhaps you learned things like how to properly speak to those who are older than you or how to dress modestly. And you were told why those things were important. As you lived with your family, listening to them and observing their manner of living, you grew in your love and affection for them because you experienced their love and care for you.

Perhaps you have a grandfather or an uncle or an aunt from whom you have learned many important things about life. From listening to and watching that loved one live his or her life you have learned how to treat people with kind hospitality, how to keep the promises you made to others or how to help those in need through giving of your possessions.

But not only have you learned from family members. As you grew and matured, perhaps you also learned from community leaders because as you heard what they said and observed their

daily lives, you saw that they were men of honor. By their life model, you trusted them and learned important things about leading and caring for others.

Yes, as we consider the context in which people learn, keep in mind how you yourself have learned as you have grown up. You have learned through relationships with people you trusted.

As you go forth to minister to others, it is vital to understand that people learn in the context of trusted relationships. If you want to minister at a worldview level, you need to understand those to whom you are ministering. To understand their worldview, you will have to develop relationships with them and work to earn their trust. But just how do you do this?

While we will talk more about this in detail in a future Lesson, let us briefly look at how George and Harriett developed relationships with the Bisorio people. George and Harriett took much time to build relationships with the Bisorios. In order to do so, they moved into the jungle and lived among the Bisorios. George and Harriett did not isolate themselves from the Bisorios but lived right alongside them. They helped them in their gardens. They sat around the fires at night and visited with them. Their children played with the Bisorio children. George went on hunting trips and long hikes through the jungle with the Bisorio men helping them as they lived life. Harriett spent much time listening to the cares and concerns of the Bisorio women, and helping them in anyway she could. By these and other means, George and Harriett deeply bonded with the Bisorios and built loving and trusting relationships with them. When the time came for George and Harriett to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the Bisorios, they were no longer strangers. The Bisorios heard God's Good News from friends! After George and Harriett shared the wonderful Gospel with the Bisorios, there was much joy and praise to God from the entire village! They came to salvation in Christ and celebrated together. Two Bisorio men, with smiles on their faces and joy overflowing their hearts, came to George and Harriett and said to them, "We knew we could trust you to tell us the truth because of the way you treated us."

So we can see the importance of building trusting relationships with those to whom we will minister. There are many ways this can be done. It will take time to learn how people build relationships in the culture in which you minister. You must live among the people. This may be very difficult because their culture and beliefs may be different from your own. But as you live with the people and relate to them in their everyday lives, you will begin to build genuine, trusting relationships, while at the same time you will gain an intimate understanding of their language, culture and worldview.

You must be trusted messengers of the Gospel just like George and Harriett were to the Bisorios. You must learn how relationships are formed and how friendships are built. You must learn the context in which these relationships are formed as well. Perhaps people spend time talking around the fire. Perhaps there is a marketplace location where much visiting takes place and friendships can be built. You must live in the community amongst the people and become a part of their community. You must live in a way that emulates Christ, perhaps helping them in their work or caring for them when they are sick, as you always are building a trust between you and them. This will take a great amount of time, but as you build trust with the people, you will be able to minister in the context of trusted and valued relationships to bring about worldview change.

## Other Factors that Influence Worldview Change

Worldview change takes place in the same way that worldviews are formed—by informal means among trusted relationships. But what are some other factors that may create interest and an environment for worldview change? Most often, the doors for worldview change are opened when worldviews are questioned by those who hold them. Remember, we have learned that worldviews are rarely recognized. This is especially true when all is well in life. When all of life is going along as normal and according to expectations, there is little need for people to consider worldview change. However, when the circumstances of life are such that people's deep emotional needs are not being met or when they cannot explain reality, their worldview is vulnerable and brought into question. When their worldview cannot explain why something has happened, people are often left very vulnerable and looking for answers.

It is vital that as people experience hardships in which they are left vulnerable and unable to explain reality, you lovingly minister to them. If they face a catastrophe such as famine or death or war, you must minister to them in the midst of their neediness. Perhaps you could help them by providing food or clothing or by helping to care for their children. As you do this, the Lord will help you to develop strong relationships and people's emotions will be deeply touched by your love and kindness.

As you gain trusted relationships among the people to whom you minister, you will be able to gently ask questions that will make them think about their own worldview. You can begin to create interest in worldview change by asking questions about things that are unexplained by their worldview. For example, perhaps a father takes his sick son to a witch doctor, believing the witch doctor is able to heal his son. What happens when the son is not healed? As appropriate, you can gently ask the father why the witch doctor was unable to heal his son. This may help the father begin to think about his worldview and it will give you further insight into his worldview.

Or perhaps a person is believed to be one who can cause rain to come. He does a certain ritual to cause rain to come, but rain never comes. As may be appropriate, you can ask your non-Christian friends, respectfully and graciously, why the rain did not come. We ask questions like this, not to provide answers but to indirectly stir them to consider the errors of their non-biblical worldview. This matter of asking questions to stir curiosity and reflection about a worldview that is not true, is only another example of how we might serve others by helping to prepare their hearts for the message of God's Word—and thereby for worldview change.

Worldview change can also take place when established values and practices are challenged. As you walk humbly with the Lord, living according to a biblical worldview before those to whom you minister, you will likely behave in different ways than they do. Perhaps as you live your lives in relationship with one another, the people will observe the different way in which you treat your wife or your children. Your godly life style may be attractive to them and they may question why you behave in a way different than they do. Yes, living a godly and loving life among the people can be another way by which the Lord challenges the people's wrong worldview. As people see different values and practices and hear different beliefs from their

own, they may question their own beliefs and practices and be more open to the message of God's love and forgiveness in Christ.

### Story and Worldview Change

It is important to understand the context in which worldview change takes place so that we can wisely minister to others. We must also understand that true worldview change will not take place without a genuine replacement of the all-encompassing story that shapes a person's worldview. Remember, this all-encompassing story gives a person understanding about the nature of reality and therefore how he believes life ought to be lived out in his society. As we minister at the worldview level through informal learning and trusted relationships, we must remember that their entire worldview needs to be replaced with a new worldview story that has God and His Word as the authoritative source.

This worldview replacement does not happen by first addressing a people's behavior. Do you remember when George gave Caba medicine for his son, thinking Caba would no longer need to go into the jungle to cut down the sago branches? George was only addressing Caba's outward behavior. He was not addressing his worldview. Therefore, Caba's worldview did not change. He still believed he needed to go into the jungle to cut down the sago palm in order to be in harmony with Yu and bring health to his son. As we can see from this example, worldview change will not occur if we only address the behavior that is shaped by the worldview foundation.

Worldview change also does not take place by simply teaching Christian values or telling a few Bible stories. This is because telling only a few selected Bible stories will not totally place a people's worldview. Those few stories will be heard and understood through the people's all-encompassing story of reality that has formed their worldview eyeglasses and will simply be added to their existing worldview. This is called syncretism. This mixing of God's Word together with existing beliefs seriously distorts His truth and the Gospel of Christ. We will learn more details about syncretism later.

True worldview change takes place only when the entire all-encompassing story of God's Word replaces the false worldview. As we take the time to proclaim the entire story that God has communicated to us in His Word, we will be communicating and establishing a worldview that honors God and truly ministers to those in need of Christ. This is where the course on Telling the Story of God, which flows from creation through the resurrection of Jesus, is so important. It is the new story that helps disciple people into a new and biblical worldview. Indeed, people will be looking at the world and life through new biblical worldview eyeglasses! This course and other courses will help you to know how to teach God's Word so that a people's former, wrong worldview is replaced by God's truth. What a joy and privilege to help others find Christ and to grow in Him! Let us keep humbly looking to God to teach us these important truths.

### Implications of Ministering for Worldview Change

Let us now consider some of the implications of ministering at the worldview level. By implications of ministering, we mean what it is going to cost you to minister at a worldview level. In the same way you work very hard in your garden so that you will get a good crop, you must also work very hard at ministering at a worldview level. You will need to learn the language, culture and worldview of a new people. This takes time. You will need to learn the stories of their culture, build friendships with them and live in the context of those that you are trying to serve. It is hard work and there are many sacrifices you must make in order to build relationships with a people with customs, culture and language that are different from your own. As always, we will need the grace and wisdom of our Lord Jesus in order to be effective ministers of His Gospel.

### Learning the Language and Culture of Those You Serve

A people's worldview is expressed through their language and culture. Therefore if we are to be successful ministers of the Gospel at a worldview level, we must learn the language and culture of those we will be serving. But just what does this mean? And how do we do it? Learning the language of a new people group is a very difficult task. When we learn a new language we are not just learning words and how to put sentences together. No, learning a new language also involves learning the culture of the people so that we can use our new language in a sensible way that the people understand. Language is learned in the context of culture. So we must immerse ourselves in the culture of those to whom we minister in order to learn and understand their language and culture well. This, in turn, will lead us to understand their worldview.

So how do we immerse ourselves in their culture in order to learn and understand their language and culture well? We can do this by living among them, interacting with them in their informal everyday settings where worldview assumptions and values are passed on. We might help them tend a garden, travel on the river with them to sell food at a market, visit with them in their homes or sit together and watch our children play together. As we do such things, we must be very attentive to their words, their actions and even their gestures. By interacting with them in their informal everyday settings, we will learn well their language as well as how their culture influences their language. This will give great insight into their worldview beliefs. Not only this, but we will also build friendships as we live and experience life alongside them.

This will not be an easy task. It might take a long time to learn the language and culture so well that you will be truly prepared to communicate the Gospel in a way the people can understand. It will probably be uncomfortable to learn new things and interact in ways that are unfamiliar. But it is vital that as we experience this discomfort, we keep in mind our end purpose: to be able to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a way they understand and in a way that causes genuine worldview change. This will only happen by God's grace, if we are able to learn the appropriate means of communication and interaction and if we are able to build trusting friendships among the people.

It is also important to recognize that learning a language also involves learning the informal means of communicating. The informal means of communication that are appropriate within a culture include things like body posture, hand motions and facial expressions. Things like these

are all a part of communicating the proper meaning, emotion or value among a people. So we must not only learn the words of a new language but also the proper ways of communicating informally. For example, their use of time may be different than ours. Perhaps when visiting with others we are more attentive to the time of a visit and they are more attentive to the actual visit itself. They may assume the success of a visit with a friend is not judged by when it begins and ends but by the quality of relating and enjoying each other's company. Another example of informal means of communication is the proximity at which one stands in relation to another when talking. In some cultures, friends stand very close when talking. To stand at a distance would show that you are not friends. Of course we would want to be very attentive to such a matter.

So you can see from two simple illustrations that it will be very important that you learn the proper expectations of communicating and relating among those you serve so that you avoid giving offense or causing confusion. As you are able to learn not only the language, but also the informal means of communication, you will learn how to communicate well in the people's language and culture and develop strong friendships among them.

These things are all very important. Why? If we fail to learn the language and culture well, our representation of God and the presentation of His message will not be clear. Your words and actions will seem foreign to the people. If you do not interact with them and truly invest in their everyday lives, you will not become a friend to them, but rather you will only seem like a foreigner. Listen carefully to what God teaches in His Word about the importance of clear communication through the apostle Paul.

“Even musical instruments like the flute or the harp, though they are lifeless, are examples of the need for speaking in plain language. For no one will recognize the melody unless the notes are played clearly. And if the bugler doesn't sound a clear call, how will the soldiers know they are being called to battle? And it's the same for you. If you talk to people in a language they don't understand, how will they know what you mean? You might as well be talking to an empty room. There are so many different languages in the world, and all are excellent for those who understand them, but to me they mean nothing. I will not understand people who speak those languages, and they will not understand me.” (1 Corinthians 14:7-11)

Have you ever heard a language that you could not understand? Or have you heard a language similar to your own but could not make sense of the words? Paul teaches us that if we do not communicate to the people in a way that they clearly understand, our ministry will be futile. If we have not learned well the language and the culture of the people to whom we minister, our message of the Gospel will be incomprehensible to them—they will not understand and they will not be able to have a genuine worldview change. They will remain without Christ! It is absolutely vital that we take the time and make a great effort to learn the language and culture of the people so that we will be able to clearly teach them God's message at a worldview level in a way they understand.

### Learning Their Stories

Another part of learning a people's culture well is learning the stories that make up their all-encompassing story of reality. We can learn this story in the same way we learn the language and culture: by interacting with the people in their everyday lives. Remember, most people don't realize that they have a worldview. So learning the stories they believe that make up their worldview will be a challenge for us. Again, we must seek our Lord's help and wisdom as we try to discern a foreign worldview.

Do you remember when George and Harriett moved into the jungle to live with the Bisorio people? The language and culture of the Bisorio people was completely foreign to George and Harriett. The Bisorios had many stories about their view of reality that George and Harriett had to learn. As George and Harriett lived among the people, worked alongside them, listened to them, asked questions of them and observed the way in which they lived, they began to learn the stories that made up their worldview beliefs.

For example, the Bisorios had stories about the many spirit beings and forces that they believed controlled reality. Do you remember the force in nature the Bisorios believed in called Yu? The Bisorios believed Yu controlled their health and that things had to be done a certain way to stay in harmony with Yu. George learned this story by observing Caba going into the jungle to cut down the sago palm branches, believing that by doing so he would bring health to his son. Later, he spoke with Caba about why he went back into the jungle and learned about Caba's belief in Yu.

The Bisorios also had a story about the Sun being the creator of all things. George and Harriett learned about this belief by listening to the older men tell stories about how the Sun created the mountains, the rivers, the animals, man and even evil spirits. As they listened to the Bisorios tell these stories, George and Harriett would ask them to share more details about how they believed the world was created. As explanations were given they would ask questions to better understand how they viewed reality.

By living among the people, George and Harriett also learned about the Bisorios' beliefs regarding death and the afterlife. As they attended funerals with the people and observed all the rituals they practiced, George and Harriett learned about their beliefs regarding death, the afterlife and ancestral spirits. They observed their rituals, listened to their words and carefully took note of the symbols they used. George and Harriett would later respectfully and graciously ask questions to better understand their beliefs about death and the afterlife. All of these things together helped them to come to an understanding of the Bisorios' worldview.

There were many, many stories and beliefs like this that George and Harriett learned over time. But they did not learn them by watching from a distance. They learned the Bisorios' all-encompassing story of reality by living among them and being part of their everyday lives.

When the time came for George and Harriett to teach the Bisorios God's message, they were able to communicate clearly in the language and culture of the Bisorio people. They had a clear understanding of their worldview story as well. They knew what the Bisorios believed about reality and so when they told them God's message they could wisely address specific areas of their reality that were in conflict with God's Word. All of the time, effort, and patience it took to



learn the language, culture and worldview of the Bisorio people led to a very clear presentation of the Gospel message—all praise to God alone!

As faithful stewards of God's Word, we must first understand the worldview of those to whom we minister and then proclaim His truth. Many times, zealous messengers of God's Word want to tell His Story before understanding the people to whom they are telling this very important Story. We must understand the hearts and minds of the people to whom we minister in order to clearly communicate the Gospel. We must understand and be able to communicate in the language and culture of the people so that we can minister at the worldview level, sharing the Gospel in a way that will make sense to them. God declares to us in His Word, "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him" Proverbs 18:13. Let us carefully heed His Word. We must first hear and understand the stories of the worldview beliefs of the people to know how to wisely speak to them about God and His Story—the Good News of Christ!

### Building Loving Relationships

If we are to be effective ministers of the Gospel, our goal should not just be to learn language and culture and worldview, but to also develop loving and trusting relationships with the people. Since worldviews are learned and passed on in the context of trusted relationships building trusted and valued relationships among the people to whom we minister will be vital as we prepare to share the Gospel with them and look to bring about worldview change.

We cannot build relationships and gain trust from a distance. We must live among those to whom we desire to minister and relate to them in their cultural context as a member of their community. This cultural context may be new and we may experience great discomfort as we try to live in a new setting and learn a language and culture that is foreign from our own. But God is calling us to live alongside those to whom we desire to minister if we are to truly reach them for Christ! As we learn their language, culture and worldview by living alongside the people, we ought also to be building relationships and forming bonds of friendship with them. We must become trusted friends of the people and gain the respect and confidence of individuals, families and community leaders. It is very important that we have genuine motives as well. Our desire should not be to simply become influential, but to follow the principles of loving one another as Christ has taught us in Scripture.

There are many ways in which we can build relationships and trust among the people to whom we minister. Reflect on some of these ways in which you might be able to interact in the daily lives of the people and begin to build trusting, loving friendships with them. Perhaps you could travel together with them out on the rugged trails or roads as you try to help them in some important task. You might just sit and talk with them down by the riverside at regular gathering places, where they talk about issues that are important to them like their children's future, the family's health, recent crop failures or perhaps the joy of an upcoming wedding. You could share a quiet afternoon in a rural village setting, listening, observing, learning, and perhaps helping in some small tasks that they are trying to accomplish like mending a broken house fence, sewing some torn clothes or preparing a meal. Perhaps you could work hard together with them in a hot and humid rice paddy. You might celebrate with them in the completion of an important

accomplishment for which they labored so diligently—perhaps a newly built home or the acquisition of a new job. You may even grieve with them at the loss of a precious loved one. It will be vital that you be ready to minister to them lovingly whenever trials strike and tragedies shake their worldview. Your relationships with them can be significantly influenced in the midst of trials and difficulties, deepening affection and trust as you minister with the love and hope available in the God we serve! As our Lord tells us in His Word, “You will earn the trust and respect of others if you work for good” Proverbs 14:22.

It is important to remember that how we live our lives before the people to whom we minister is part of God’s Story as well. We must model the life of Christ in all our relationships—with each other and with the people to whom we minister. For example, in our own lives, we must live upright, consistent and kind lives. We must be diligent workers and people who keep our word. We must show that we ourselves are humble learners. In our relationships with each other we must treat one another with love and respect. As husband and wife, we must demonstrate love and humility toward one another. If we have children, we must show that we love them dearly and that they are obedient to us. We must treat the people whom we serve with respect, living humbly among them. We must not be boastful or arrogant. We must also demonstrate lives that submit to their community leaders. In this way, we will show them Christ long before we ever tell them about Him. As we faithfully live godly lives among those we serve we are like a letter written by Christ, “...known and read by all men” 2 Corinthians 3:2.

Loving the people to whom we minister, caring for them, respecting them and relating to them in the various contexts of real, everyday life situations will all assist you in building genuine, healthy relationships, while at the same time you gain an intimate understanding of their language, culture and worldview. These things are not our ultimate goal in and of themselves, but rather we labor to see people come to Christ and to go on as His true disciples, living all of life for God with a true, biblical worldview!

### Lesson Review

Let’s now review this lesson.

First, we have learned that worldviews are formed in the informal setting of everyday life. People’s worldviews are developed from the very beginning of childhood as they listen to stories, as they experience relationships, as they feel emotions and practice customs within their community. Their worldviews are formed through what they hear and see modeled and through interaction and imitation of what they hear and see.

We also learned that most people learn their worldview unknowingly. They do not consciously recognize as they hear a story or practice a cultural custom that their worldview beliefs are being developed.

We learned that worldview change takes place in the context of trusted and valued relationships. In order to build these trusted relationships with the people to whom we minister, we must live among the people and interact with them in their everyday lives. This will take a great amount of

time, but as we build trust with the people, we will be able to minister in the context of trusted and valued relationships to bring about worldview change.

We also learned that certain things create interest and an environment for worldview change. For example, when life is disrupted and does not make sense, a faulty worldview might be questioned and examined. Or, as we live among the people to whom we minister, we may be able to respectfully and gently ask questions about inconsistencies in their faulty worldview. The way we live our own lives in front of the people might also cause them to question their worldview if our lives are lived out differently than theirs.

We learned that true worldview change takes place only when the entire all-encompassing story of God's Word replaces the false worldview. As we take the time to proclaim the entire story that God has communicated to us in His Word, we will be communicating and establishing a worldview that honors God and truly ministers to those in need of Christ.

To tell God's story we must learn well the language and culture of the people to whom we minister. We can do this by living alongside them and participating in their everyday lives. As we listen and learn the words, gestures and cultural meanings of their language as well as the informal means of communication, we will be able to clearly communicate the Gospel of Christ in a way that will make sense to them.

We must learn well the all-encompassing story that shapes the worldview of the people to whom we minister. We must understand the way they view reality. As we understand their worldview, we will be able to share the message of God appropriately in a way that addresses the way they look at reality and live their lives.

To build deep friendships and trust among the people we must consciously love, care for, respect and relate to those to whom we desire to minister in their everyday lives. By doing this, we will build a trust that enables us to share the Gospel with people who will have hearts to hear a message from their friends.

As you reflect upon what we have learned in this Lesson, discuss with your classmates the costs and implications for you of ministering at a worldview level.

1. What may be some of the hindrances to your ability to minister at a worldview level?
2. How can these hindrances be overcome? What help do you feel you need to overcome them?

As you reflect on and discuss these questions with one another, pray that God will enable you to work through the various challenges of learning a new language and culture and living among an unfamiliar people. Pray that He will help you to always keep the purpose of your ministry in mind: to minister in a way that will bring about genuine worldview change that will honor God.

In the next Lesson, we will learn how ministering at a worldview level will significantly and positively affect our evangelistic efforts for Christ.

## **Lesson Nine**

### **A Worldview Approach to Evangelism**

#### **Preparing the Soil**

Ministering at a worldview level involves much more than just encountering a people group and immediately proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to those who have never heard it. Ministering at a worldview level can be compared to planting a garden. Before a garden is planted, the soil must be tilled well in preparation. In the same way, we must till the soil of our ministry to a foreign people well in preparation for sharing the Gospel.

In the last few Lessons, we have learned how to prepare for evangelism. Before we can communicate the Gospel of Christ clearly and in a way the people can truly understand, we must have accomplished certain important things.

First, we must have established healthy friendships with the people. Not only must these friendships be in place, but they must be maintained and nurtured through ongoing love and care. Remember, we cannot build relationships and gain trust from a distance. We must live among those to whom we desire to minister and relate to them in their cultural context as an active member of their community. We have learned many ways in which we can build relationships with the people in the midst of their cultural context. We could travel with them, work alongside them or just spend an afternoon talking with them in their homes. We could talk about important issues with them like their children's future, the family's health, recent crop failures or perhaps the joy of an upcoming wedding. We can show them our love for them by celebrating with them, mourning with them or caring for them when they are sick. As we learn their language, culture and worldview by living alongside the people, we will be forming bonds of friendship with them. We must become trusted friends of the people and gain the respect and confidence of individuals, families and community leaders.

All this is very important for effective evangelism at a worldview level. We must first gain the deep trust of the community and earn the right to be heard by showing ourselves trustworthy, faithful, kind, loving and respectful. As the people to whom we minister trust us as friends, they will be more receptive to new things we share with them that are different from what they believe.

#### **Time, Patience and Cultural Context**

Preparing the soil for doing evangelism at a worldview level takes a significant amount of time and patience. We have learned that all people hold deeply and emotionally to their worldview even though they may not realize it or say so. Because that is true, preparing to share biblical truth with them at a worldview level is going to be hard work. This hard work is going to call for an investment of much time and patience, living where they live and being a member of their community so we can one day proclaim the message of Jesus Christ intelligently and effectively.

Learning the language and the culture of the people to whom we minister is vital in our preparation for evangelism. This is not only because we want to form strong friendships with

them and to understand their all-encompassing story of reality. We also must have a very good understanding of the language, culture and worldview of the people because when the time comes to share the Gospel, we will be doing so in their own language and in their own cultural context. If we share the Gospel as a foreigner—someone whom they do not know well and who does not understand their language and culture well—God’s message will not be clear and will be difficult for them to understand. We must invest a lot of time and be patient if we are to truly learn their language and culture so that we can present the Gospel on the worldview level.

Let us look to the example of the apostle Paul. Once, he asked other Christians living in a town called Colosse to pray for him so he could effectively proclaim the Gospel of Christ to others. He said, “Pray, then, that I may speak, as I should, in such a way as to make it clear” Colossians 4:3-4. Paul asked the church to pray that he could make the message of Christ clear in the way he ought. Paul knew that the Gospel must be heard clearly by people if they are to truly trust Christ for salvation.

In writing to Christians living in a town called Corinth, Paul expressed his desire to do whatever he had to so that he could see others trust Christ. He said, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law” 1 Corinthians 9:20. He goes on to say in verse 22, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.” Paul understood the importance and the time and hard work it took to assimilate into a new culture in order to communicate clearly and effectively at a level that would be life-changing.

We must also realize that the original false worldview of the people to whom you minister did not develop in a day. It took years—even many generations—to develop and it is likely that it has been unchanged for as long. We must first understand well their entire all-encompassing story of reality. We must know the entire rival story before we can begin to address it and see the new biblical story of God replace it.

Remember, this will not be easy. We will be confronting an entire worldview story that is “raised up against the knowledge of God” 2 Corinthians 10:5. Confronting their worldview will be like bringing down a fortress! Just as their worldview did not develop in a day, neither can we presume that a worldview held so tightly, for so long and by so many people will change in a day. The process of genuine worldview change will take much time and, by God’s power, we must be patient to steadfastly proclaim God’s Word clearly through this process.

### Replacing the Old with the New

As we begin our evangelistic ministry after having taken the time to carefully prepare the soil by building friendships and learning their language, culture and worldview, we must lay a firm foundation for a clear Gospel presentation and the ongoing development of a biblical worldview. But just how do we do that? We lay this firm foundation by beginning to build a biblical worldview through the careful and wise teaching of God’s truth through the stories of the Scriptures. As we do this not only will a biblical worldview begin to be built, old rival stories will be replaced.

Remember, rival stories are stories that do not have God and His Word as their authoritative source and do not lead to a biblical worldview. These stories are rival stories to God and His Story to us. They are worldview stories that challenge God's testimony regarding what is true about the nature of reality: who God is, who man is, what spirits exist, what man's purpose is, what sin is, how sin is forgiven, what happens to man after death and many other such aspects of reality. It is vital that as we begin to build a biblical worldview by teaching God's truth through His Story, we teach in such a way that the rival story begins to be replaced with the truth of God's Word and thereby a new and biblical worldview begins to be formed.

As we carefully and wisely proclaim God's Word in evangelism, biblical truths will be developed among the people and their non-biblical worldview will be brought into question. They will begin to think about their worldview and compare it to the biblical worldview you are teaching them. The wisdom, insight and care needed for this important task will come, by God's grace, from you having lived among the people and having gained a true understanding of their language, culture and worldview.

As we attempt to proclaim God's Word and build a new worldview among the people by God's wisdom and grace, one of our first goals should be to establish a new authoritative source for worldview beliefs. Knowing well their worldview will enable us to also know what the authoritative source for their worldview is and how to address it and replace it with God and His Word. This is a very important principle of ministry.

For example, when George and Harriett were learning the worldview of the Bisorio people, they learned that the authoritative source for what they believed to be true about reality was their ancestors. The Bisorios believed the stories their ancestors told them and lived their lives in accordance with those stories. Because George and Harriett took the time to first learn this, they knew ahead of time that as they began to share God's Word with the Bisorios, they would be competing with the stories of the ancestors of the Bisorios. They first took the time to understand well what the Bisorio worldview story and the authoritative source for it was and so they knew how to better address this matter when they shared God's Word. This matter of establishing a new authority for one's worldview is no small matter. For if people do not accept the authority of God and His Word neither will they accept the message of His Son! And without Christ they have no eternal hope.

As we proclaim God's Word at a worldview level it will also involve the teaching of new or modified concepts about the nature of reality in accordance with a biblical worldview: who God is, who Man is, what sin is, ideas about judgment, redemption and forgiveness. But how do we do this? We do this by carefully and strategically teaching the stories of God's Word.

For example, it is very important, even in our evangelistic efforts, that as we tell God's story, we begin where He began: at creation. We must lay the foundation for God's Story just as He did for us. It is in the beginning of God's Word that a new biblical worldview for people will begin to take shape: a new view of God, of themselves and of the world as a whole. This is a very important foundation to set in place before ever sharing the Gospel with people who have never heard it.

As George and Harriett began their evangelistic ministry among the Bisorios they started at the beginning of God's Story—with creation. When George and Harriett shared the story of creation with the Bisorios, the truth of God's Word began to develop new ideas about the nature of reality that were in contrast to what the Bisorios had believed for many, many years. Remember, the Bisorios believed that the sun had created them and that they lived in a world full of spirits and forces that were unpredictable and fickle and yet that governed their lives. They lived in constant fear of these spirits and forces, always wondering if they were in harmony with them or not. When the Bisorios heard the story of creation, their fearful worldview was challenged by the story of an all-powerful, good and kind God who had created them and cared for them and loved them. This was in stark contrast to the fear brought on by the spirits they believed existed. And so as George and Harriett continued to share about God and His Story, the Bisorios began to discover an all-powerful, kind, and loving God to whom they began to become deeply attracted. They began to understand that they were participants in the truth of God's Story. Because George and Harriett carefully taught the truth of God's Word at a worldview level in contrast to the Bisorios' false worldview, the Spirit of God powerfully worked God's truth into the hearts and minds of the Bisorios. There is much more to this important subject, but as we said at the beginning of this Lesson, the details will be more fully covered in other courses.

As we continue to minister God's Word at a worldview level, not only will it pave the way for a clear presentation of the Gospel, but it will also provide a firm foundation for those who come to Christ. Their new life in Christ and understanding of reality according to God's Word will be a strong and solid foundation upon which to grow and mature as Christians.

### Ministry Effectiveness

Perhaps ministering at a worldview level is different from how you have thought about ministry in the past. Perhaps the time and preparation for ministering at a worldview level are new ideas to you. That is okay. As you begin to practice what you are learning, you will be better ministers of God's Word.

We have learned many times that ministering at a worldview level will be a difficult task. The shift from a false worldview to a biblical worldview is enormous and will not come easily for people. Remember, worldviews are held with deep emotion and are tied to the very identity of individuals and communities. We cannot underestimate the change that will need to take place in order for someone's old, false worldview to be replaced with a new, biblical worldview that brings glory and honor to God. It is truly only a work of God that can cause such a genuine change. For our part as God's messengers, we must do all we can in preparation to share the Gospel message of Jesus Christ in a way that will bring about this genuine worldview change and see the old worldview beliefs and the practices that went with it replaced.

We have learned that we must prepare our soil well. We must learn the language and culture so well that we can clearly communicate the Gospel message to the people in a way they understand. We must learn their all-encompassing story of reality so well that we know exactly how to speak the Gospel message at a level that is comprehensible to them. We must live our lives in a way that provides a testimony to the Gospel message even before we begin to tell the story. We must establish trusting friendships so that when we share the Gospel message it will be

a story from a trusted friend who deeply cares about the salvation of his neighbor. Above all, we must look daily to our Lord Jesus for wisdom, strength, grace and perseverance as we seek to lead others into a loving relationship with their Creator.

Following the principles of God's Word in ministering at a worldview level will not only prove to be different, but more importantly, it will prove to be a more effective way to minister to a foreign people. It will set in place solid foundations for the growth, development and multiplication of the newly planted church. Then, when our task is completed, the new disciples of Christ will continue to grow and be effective ministers to others. May God grant us His wisdom and insight into doing evangelism at a worldview level so that those we lead to Christ will have a good example to follow as His disciples!

### **Ramifications of Ministering for Worldview Change**

If, by God's grace, we are successful in preparing the soil and evangelizing in such a way that people truly believe on Christ and genuine worldview change is accomplished, there will be various outcomes for the new believers. A very positive outcome is that they will understand God's truth more clearly. In time, they will be able to evaluate their own practices in light of what God says rather than in light of what they previously believed. Furthermore, they will begin living a new way of life for God among those who do not yet know or love God. When God is working at a worldview level in people's hearts, people will be different. When they understand God's truth more clearly and want to live for Him, there will be new areas of pressure in relationships. They will begin to evaluate social and cultural issues in the light of God's truth.

It is important to remember that as the worldview of an individual or a people changes, the cultural environment in which they live does not change. It remains the same. As you might imagine, both we as ministers of the Gospel and they as new believers will face certain challenging issues. Remember, worldview change does not happen in a day. New believers who have heard God's Story and have trusted Christ for salvation will need to continue to work through old worldview beliefs and practices in light of their new authoritative source for all of life—God's Word. Biblical worldview development is still taking place in their hearts and minds. As we lovingly help them to work through the challenges they face, we must look to God our Father together for His grace to know how to wisely address with patience and empathy some of the deep and emotional challenges they will experience.

### **Implications of Worldview Change in Relation to Society and Culture**

As we have learned, all people live within their society in particular relationships, with customs and practices that help them live in harmony. These relationships, customs and practices of a society are strongly influenced by their worldview. These include things like how marriage is carried out, how a family lives together, what religious rites are practiced, how an economy functions, what laws are passed, what education involves, and even how arts and music are practiced. The foundation for how people live out their lives in their society and culture and how they relate to others is also built upon what they believe about the nature of reality. For example, how people marry and how they live as families is directly related to how they view the relationships of life. The traditions they practice with regard to education, government or religion



are also strongly influenced by their worldview beliefs. People find their identity both as individuals and as a community by living together and practicing their customs and traditions.

Now what happens when the worldview beliefs about reality change? Many areas of life will come into tension and conflict with the truth of God's Word. This is one of the ramifications of genuine worldview change. Yes, as people come into a relationship with Christ, gain new life in God and begin to form a new worldview, there will be areas of tension and conflict between God's new ways and some of their old ways. This is because as the new believers are experiencing a new worldview being developed within their hearts and minds, they are still living in the same social and cultural context in which they have lived for many years. For example, when a person becomes a Christian, certain customs regarding marriage might come into question as he looks at things through the eyeglasses of a new biblical worldview rather than through the former eyeglasses of a false worldview. God's Word, their new authoritative source for worldview beliefs, may say something different than the authoritative source of their old worldview. Who can marry whom? What does a Christian, a follower of Christ, do if the cultural rituals for a marriage ceremony do not honor God? What does a Christian do if there is pressure from the community for an unbeliever to marry a believer when God's Word teaches the opposite of that? Let us consider an example from the Bisorio culture to help us reflect on some of these kinds of challenges.

In the Bisorio culture when a man desires to marry a woman, it is the woman's maternal uncle—the brother of the woman's mother—who has the final say as to whether the man can marry the woman. The maternal uncle's word carries more authority than even the woman's parents. Since this is the cultural custom, a Bisorio man who wants to marry a particular woman will always try to stay in good favor with the woman's family, particularly with the woman's maternal uncle. The man will seek to maintain favor by helping the uncle make a garden, mend a fence, build a house or share some of what has been killed in hunting.

In light of this custom among the Bisorios, consider the struggle that these new Bisorio Christians faced. Salugu, a Bisorio Christian man, wanted to marry a Bisorio Christian woman, Maiyai whom he loved dearly. However, Maiyai's maternal uncle Elo asked Salugu to join him in a pig sacrifice ritual to dead ancestors. Elo was not a Christian. What was Salugu to do? He knew that if he did not maintain the good favor of Elo, Elo would not allow Salugu to marry his beloved Maiyai and she would become someone else's wife! And yet Salugu, as a new Christian, knew that he should not be involved with offering pig sacrifices to dead ancestors! Salugu was in deep emotional turmoil within his heart and mind. What was Salugu to do? What would you advise him?

This kind of inner battle for new believers regarding social and cultural issues is very real. These kinds of issues are very emotional. They are some of the new ramifications of genuine worldview change having taken place in a person's life. Answers will not come easily. Some may make wrong decisions. We must be prepared to be patient, wise and loving as we draw alongside our brothers and sisters and help them grow in the Lord. Remember, their biblical worldview is still being developed. As we help people make proper decisions before the Lord, we should desire to be as our Lord Jesus who, as He ministered to others, was "gentle and humble in spirit" Matthew 11:29.

These are crucial questions. What happens when a person's worldview begins to change? What happens when their former customs and traditions are now understood as being unacceptable in light of their new biblical worldview? How does a person continue to live in the community of others who do not share his new worldview? There will often be a great deal of pressure on new believers from their non-believing family and community members to forsake Christ or face being ostracized from the community.

Do you remember what happened to Yesuel in the country of Israel? When he accepted Christ as his Savior and his worldview began to change, he saw that the practices of his family and community were not in accord with what God taught in Scripture. Because Yesuel humbly and faithfully followed his belief in Christ and no longer participated in his society's customs and traditions, his family and community ostracized him and no longer welcomed him in their homes. Even his own parents had rejected him and he had to move to a different town to find a living to support himself and his family.

So we can see that genuine worldview change can result in losing valued relationships among one's family and community. These involve deep trial and powerful emotional struggles for both the new believer and the young local church. We cannot look on these things lightly. This is a serious spiritual battle. If we are to minister at a worldview level we must look fully to our Lord Jesus for His strength, wisdom, and love. We must trust in Him to help us be prepared to patiently minister to and help our brothers and sisters as they experience the ramifications of seeking to live honorably and faithfully for the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Ramifications in Religious Celebrations

Just as customs and traditions are practiced within the context of valued relationships in a community, so religion is often practiced together among family and community members. Religious events are often communal in nature and therefore there is great pressure on all community members to participate in the generally accepted rituals. When an individual departs from the accepted rituals because his new biblical worldview stands in contrast to the worldview of his community, he will likely face persecution. There may be a significant pressure to conform so that his family might save face in the midst of the entire community. This can be a tremendous, emotional weight for the new believer to bear. There is a great deal of inner turmoil that a new believer faces when his biblical worldview stands in such distinct contrast to the widely-held false worldview of his family and community.

For example, George and Harriett saw many new Bisorio believers wrestle with the pressure from the unbelievers to participate in an ungodly tradition festival dance called the yabo. The yabo festival tradition among the Bisorios was a very important time of community celebration and involved pig sacrifices to dead ancestors, as well as singing idolatrous songs of praise to various created things like the moon, animals and birds. Everyone among all the neighboring villages was expected to take part in this festive time. People prepared for months ahead of time for the yabo. It was a central celebration for them as a people. To take part in the yabo was to

affirm your identity as a Bisorio and your allegiance to your clan, the community and the ancestors.

Because of the centrality of the yabo and all that it had meant to them before they came to Christ, many Bisorio Christians struggled with great relational and emotional pressures when it came time to celebrate the yabo. This was no small issue. To not partake in the yabo meant, among other things, denial of what their families wanted and expected. It took much teaching, praying and patient guiding of the Bisorios through this issue before they came to the place of further worldview change and were able to fully yield to God regarding this matter, regardless of the consequences. Yes, brothers and sisters, ministering at a worldview level will involve much time, prayer and loving patience.

### Ramifications in Everyday Life Needs

In most cultures, the way food is gathered is strongly influenced by a worldview. For example, as we heard in the story of Caba, there was a proper way to harvest the sago palm. This included not only felling the tree, but also the way in which the pulp was prepared. Do you remember why there was a proper way to harvest the sago palm? It was because according to the Bisorios' worldview, they must harvest the sago palm in a way so as to remain in harmony with a force called Yu and thereby have health for their families. When a worldview that strongly influences the way life is lived on a daily basis changes, a new believer will begin to evaluate his daily living practices—including how food is gathered—in light of what God says in His Word.

Just as there is tension in the social relationships and cultural customs and practices that are in conflict with a new biblical worldview, there will also be new areas of conflict in the way daily life is lived. For example, it will be a great challenge for new believers to know how to handle crop failure that has always been attributed to pleasing a spirit being. Consider this carefully. How will you guide new disciples in the midst of crop failure, when they have worked diligently and humbly looked to God in faith and prayer for daily sustenance? What if they are tempted to take part in former beliefs and practices, like incantations and offerings, to obtain food? How would you guide them?

One day a new Christian named Hadebo shared with a missionary friend how he struggled in the midst of a failed hunting trip. Before going hunting he had humbly prayed to God, turning his back on his former beliefs and practices. He was trusting God alone for help in hunting. He hunted all day and yet got nothing. His hunger pangs were real and intense. He came back to the village empty handed. Hadebo freely shared the great struggle and temptation he felt to call out to former spirits for help. Reflect on this true account. If we are to help our brothers and sisters in Christ to continue to develop a true biblical worldview, we must be prepared to patiently and lovingly help them with practical, daily struggles like these.

Consider another example of the practical, daily struggles new believers will face. In the Kipsigis culture, when a person was ill, it was the custom to see a diviner to find the cause of his illness. A Kipsigis man named Stephen who was a Christian fell sick one day. He struggled about whether he ought to pray to God and ask for healing or if he ought to follow the custom of his

people and their false worldview and go to see a diviner. Stephen decided he must go to the diviner to find out the cause of his illness.

As was the custom, Stephen took a sheep to the diviner, which the diviner slaughtered in sacrifice. He then looked at the intestines of the slain sheep to divine the cause of Stephen's illness. The diviner told Stephen that he was ill because he had failed to pay the correct bride price for his wife which angered his deceased father-in-law. So the diviner concluded that the ancestor spirit of his deceased father-in-law had made him sick and that the only way to be healed was to immediately pay the correct bride price through an offering poured onto the shrine of his deceased father-in-law. Stephen wrestled with what he ought to do. Was his allegiance to his Creator God or was it to his ancestor spirits? Even though he knew it was wrong to sacrifice and give offerings to the ancestor spirits, he still followed the advice of the diviner.

While Stephen failed in this struggle to follow the Lord, those around him continued to encourage him as his new biblical worldview was still being formed. Stephen's struggle will be very similar to the struggles you will see new believers face as they wrestle between their new biblical worldview and their old false worldview. You must be prepared to wisely and patiently counsel them through these struggles. For example, how will you counsel new believers when their precious loved ones are deathly ill? They have sought their new-found Lord and Savior in prayer and faith, yet prayer and medical care efforts seem to fail. The emotional pressure to seek counsel and help from old practices and practitioners causes incredible internal conflict in the new Christian. What will you say when they are tempted to employ a syncretistic approach—entreating the True God and local spirits to find the means to recovery? These are important questions to think about as you help new believers face these very real ramifications of a new biblical worldview.

### Practical Areas of Impact and Influence

Now that we have considered some of the challenges the new believer will face as his worldview begins to change from a false worldview to a biblical worldview, let us now look at the areas that will be an encouragement and support to him through the tension and conflict he experiences. It is important to understand that the pressures a new believer faces are normal as he experiences a tremendous change in his worldview. But it is even more important to remember that he is not alone. Our Lord Jesus, who opened his mind and heart to His Truth, will also give him the strength and courage to be a devoted disciple in the midst of trial. As our precious Savior has promised each of us who belong to Him, "I will never leave you; I will never abandon you" Hebrews 13:5.

As we continue to teach and minister to new believers, we must encourage them and emphasize to them the value that our Lord Jesus places on them as individuals. This is especially important in societies where their identity has been founded in their participation within the community. Let us briefly consider a couple of stories Jesus told to emphasize His deep care and concern for us as individuals.

Do you recall the story of the Good Shepherd from the Gospel of Luke, Lesson 15? Jesus told a story about a good shepherd who, after putting 99 of his sheep safely in the pasture, went out to

look for one missing sheep—just one missing sheep! The good shepherd searched and searched for that lost sheep until he finally found it. When he found it, he carried it home rejoicing. Jesus told that story so that we would know how deeply important an individual and his or her salvation is to God. Reflect on that! At one time each of us was like that one lost sheep before trusting Christ. But the Lord kept faithfully working in our lives to draw us to Himself until we were finally found by Him. What a wonderful Savior! Yes, Jesus wants us to know that each and every one of us is dear and precious to Him as an individual person.

The Lord Jesus also told a story about a woman who lost one coin and frantically swept her entire house to find it. She searched and searched diligently until she found the one coin she had lost. Then she rejoiced greatly. That is how God diligently searched for each of us as individuals until we came to Christ. He never gave up on any of us, but kept working and working in our individual lives until we came to faith in His Son. How deeply our Lord cares for us as individuals! We must continue to disciple new believers in this wonderful truth.

So we can see that Jesus cares deeply for us as individuals. He deeply cares that people come to experience salvation in Him. And He continues to deeply care about each and every believer's spiritual growth and walk with God.

As we emphasize the individual's importance to Christ, we must also continue teaching the new believer and equipping him in his biblical worldview development. We must encourage him to walk with the Lord and learn His ways. This will involve new character development that is consistent with a biblical worldview. We must encourage him to address sin in his life that goes against the Word of God. We must be gentle and wise in teaching him how to walk through the trials he will face, always using the Scriptures as our guide.

As new Bisorio Christians were faithfully taught the truth God's Word and their worldview understanding further developed they began to undergo genuine growth in their moral character. For example, they stopped using profanity, became honest in their daily dealings of trade and barter and freely shared with those in need. All of these kinds of things truly glorified God. This is a wonderful ramification of ministering for genuine worldview change.

As the new believer continues to grow, we must help him learn how to effectively share his faith in his own cultural context by word, deed and attitude. Just as we have ministered to them at a worldview level, we must lead them in knowing how to influence others for Christ, whether family, clan or community. Just as our goal was worldview change, so their goal ought to be to see worldview change in others who they lead to Christ. How we have lived our own lives before them as we have ministered to them will be a great testimony and a model for them as they attempt to be ministers to their own people. Because of this, we ought to recognize the great importance of our own lives as examples and testimonies to the people.

Because of the powerful work of the Spirit of God among the Bisorio people at a worldview level, the very first thing they did after coming to Christ was to faithfully begin to tell their unsaved relatives about God and His Good News! But they did not start their efforts by telling them about Jesus. No, they wisely began their evangelistic ministry as it had been done among them—starting at the beginning of God's Word, and building a worldview foundation. They

went on to see others truly come to Christ and other churches solidly established. This too is another wonderful ramification of taking time to minister at a worldview level.

### The Local Community of Believers

As we encourage new believers as individuals, we must also direct them in forming a local community of Christ followers—a church body. It is important that this body of believers lives within their existing community and do not segregate and isolate themselves. We must equip the local church to stay actively engaged in their community and be “a pillar and support of the truth” 1 Timothy 3:15. We must teach them to have the good effectiveness that salt has on food while being distinct in their identity from the rest of the community.

We must also help new believers to establish a genuine sense of belonging to the Lord and to one another if the church is to have this kind of godly influence in a difficult and often hostile context. After many of the Bisorios had become Christians, they exemplified this well over time. The new believers were united and understood that they belonged to the Lord and that they were a family of believers themselves. Over the course of many years, because of genuine worldview change, the Bisorio church has demonstrated a very positive, godly and powerful influence on aspects of society and culture.

To God’s glory they have had a deep impact on such things as bride prices and the legal system. The bride prices used to be very expensive and unreasonable, but now there is more equity and fairness. The legal proceedings used to involve much deceit and dishonesty, but now, because of the presence of the Bisorio church, there is more integrity and fairness. Yes, because of their godly lives and humble walk with God, God has granted the church powerful moral influence. It has become a strong influence for godliness and equity in Bisorio society. If the church would have withdrawn and isolated itself from the community, its ability to adorn the doctrine of God’s grace would also have been withdrawn. This would have also hindered others from being drawn to the precious hope of the Good News of Christ.

The Bisorio church has learned by God’s grace and through learning well the Scriptures, that they are to be an instrument for worldview change within their own community and to surrounding cultures. It is vital that as we teach new believers how to be a community of Christ’s followers, we teach them to live for God within their existing community. The ramifications of worldview change can be wonderfully powerful if, by God’s grace, we will submit to Him and His Word and are willing to invest the time, exercise the patience and do the hard work of ministering at a worldview level.

### Lesson Review

Let us now review what we have learned in this Lesson.

We have learned that there will be significant ramifications when a new believer forms a new, biblical worldview that stands in opposition to his old false worldview. Their worldview change will not happen in a day. New believers who have heard God’s Story and have trusted Christ for

salvation will need to continue to work through old worldview beliefs and practices in light of their new authoritative source for all of life—God’s Word.

We have learned that there will be challenges that they will face in their everyday lives. Many areas of life will come into tension and conflict with the truth of God’s Word. There will be a great emotional inner battle for new believers to continue practicing social, cultural and religious customs within their communities that are not in accordance with their new biblical worldview. There will often be a great deal of pressure on new believers from their non-believing family and community members to forsake Christ or face being ostracized from the community. A ramification of genuine worldview change can be losing valued relationships among one’s family and community.

We have also learned that there will be ramifications of worldview change in the way life is lived on a daily basis. A new believer will begin to evaluate his daily living practices—including how food is gathered, how sickness is dealt with, how marriage is carried out—in light of what God says in His Word. At times it will be a struggle for the new believer to forsake his old practices and live according to his new biblical worldview. If we are to help our brothers and sisters in Christ to continue to develop a true biblical worldview, we must be prepared to patiently and lovingly help them with practical, daily struggles.

We have learned that we must encourage and emphasize new believers in their new life in Christ and all that that entails. Jesus cares deeply for them as individuals, even when they feel isolated from their families and communities. We must encourage them to continue to develop moral character that is consistent with a biblical worldview. We must be gentle and wise in teaching them how to walk through the trials they will face, always using the Scriptures as our guide.

Finally, we have learned that we must encourage the believer to grow in the fellowship of other believers—the church. As the new believers continue to grow, we must help them learn how to effectively share their faith in their own cultural context by word, deed and attitude. It is also vital that as we teach new believers how to be a community of Christ’s followers, we teach them to live for God within their existing community.

In the next Lesson, we will further consider the biblical benefits of discipling others at a worldview level.

## **Lesson Ten**

### **Worldview Change and Discipleship**

In the last lesson we learned that there will be significant ramifications when new believers gain a new, biblical worldview that stands in opposition to their old, false worldview. Though they have joyfully come to Christ, further worldview change will still need to take place within them. New believers who have heard God's Story and have trusted Christ for salvation will need to continue to work through old worldview beliefs and practices in light of their new authoritative source for all of life—God's Word.

We also learned that there will be challenges that they will face in their everyday lives. Many areas of life will come into tension and conflict with the truth of God's Word. At times there will be a great emotional inner battle for new believers to continue practicing social, cultural and religious customs within their communities that are not in accordance with their new biblical worldview. There will often be a great deal of pressure on new believers from their non-believing family and community members to forsake Christ or face being ostracized from the community. A ramification of genuine worldview change can be losing valued relationships among one's family and community.

We learned that there will be ramifications from worldview change in the way life is lived on a daily basis. A new believer will begin to evaluate his daily living practices—including how food is gathered, how sickness is dealt with, how marriage is carried out, funeral practices—in light of what God says in His Word. At times it will be a struggle for the new believer to forsake his old practices and live according to his new biblical worldview. If we are to help our brothers and sisters in Christ to continue to develop a true biblical worldview, we must be prepared to patiently and lovingly help them with practical, daily struggles.

We learned that we must encourage and emphasize new believers in their new life in Christ and all that that entails. Jesus cares deeply for them as individuals, even when they feel isolated from their families and communities. We must encourage them to continue to walk with the Lord, allowing Him to develop moral character that is consistent with a biblical worldview. We must be gentle and wise in teaching them how to walk through the trials they will face, always using the Scriptures as our guide.

Finally, we learned that we must encourage the believer to grow in the fellowship of other believers—the church. As the new believers continue to grow, we must help them learn how to effectively share their faith in their own cultural context by word, deed and attitude. It is also vital that as we teach new believers how to be a community of Christ's followers, we teach them to live for God within their existing community.

Now let us further consider the changes in a new believer's life that will develop with genuine worldview change.

### **A New, Biblical Worldview**



As we proclaim God's Word at a worldview level it will involve the teaching of new or modified concepts about the nature of reality in accordance with a biblical worldview: who God is, who Man is, what sin is, ideas about judgment, redemption and forgiveness. Remember, as we tell God's story, we must begin where He began: at creation. We must lay the foundation for God's Story just as He did for us. It is in the beginning of God's Word that a new biblical worldview for people will begin to take shape: a new view of God, of themselves and of the world as a whole. As you will learn from other courses, the stories from the Old Testament will also help lay a solid worldview foundation. It is very important to set in place a strong foundation before ever sharing the Gospel with people who have never heard it. This will help them to have a clear understanding of God's Good News. This in turn will give new believers a firm and biblical foundation on which to continue growing in their walk with God through continued teaching and application. It will also provide the framework for us as ministers for healthy, ongoing discipleship.

As we begin to look at areas in which we will see the new believer's life begin to change, we must remember that a new biblical worldview is just beginning to form. As the new believer has trusted Christ as his Savior and is beginning to look at life through new worldview eyeglasses, he will begin to see conflict in his life because of his old, false worldview. There will be tension as he begins to displace his old worldview with a new biblical worldview. Remember, this will take much time and patience and we must be willing to gently and wisely walk alongside our new brothers and sisters in Christ as they learn to live life according to their new worldview.

Throughout this course, we have listened to stories about many different people groups and individuals to illustrate various aspects of ministry. In this Lesson, we will primarily look to the example of the Bisorio people group of Papua New Guinea to gain a clear understanding of the changes that new believers will experience as they begin to live their lives according to a biblical worldview.

### Areas of Change in the New Believer's Life

As a Christian, the new believer now has God's Word as his authoritative source for evaluating all of life. He will begin to judge and assess his former beliefs and practices in light of what God says in His Word. When many of the Bisorios became Christians, they began to evaluate their practices and beliefs by God's truth. Because they had been taught the Scriptures at a worldview level from the beginning of evangelism, they had a solid biblical understanding of reality: who God is, who they themselves are, what sin really is, how they are forgiven through the Lord Jesus Christ alone, what life's purpose is and many such worldview issues. Listen carefully to a few examples of new Bisorio believers judging their old practices as false in light of God's Word as their new authoritative source for their worldview beliefs.

Before believing on Christ, the Bisorios believed that a certain fruit, called dage, could not be eaten by men and women together. They believed that if men and women ate dage fruit together, they could become severely ill and perhaps even die. However, once the Bisorios began to understand God's truth about His authority over all of life, they saw their former belief about the dage fruit as being wrong. They believed, according to God's Word, that He was a good Creator and had Himself provided the fruit for all men to enjoy. They also realized that in Christ there is

no difference between men and women; God created and cares for both. They saw that there was no reason they should not eat the daga fruit together as men and women. Because they had trusted God's Word and had a proper worldview understanding, they actually started eating the daga fruit together as men and women in a public setting! This was an extremely significant act and evidenced their trust in God and His Word. A genuine new worldview belief set them free from the fear and bondage of the old, false worldview. The new worldview belief led to a new practice as God desired. So we can see from this example how the Bisorio Christians judged a former belief as false and instead lived according to God's truth.

Another belief the Bisorios had before coming to Christ was a belief in evil spirits they called yama. They believed that the yama was the main cause of death. They were terrified of the yama and lived their lives in constant fear of them. For example, they would never go to the jungle by themselves at night for fear that the yama would, as they said, "eat them." By fearing being "eaten" they meant being "killed." The fear of the yama was a common and deep fear among all the Bisorios.

A Bisorio man named Hameyagu came to Christ with great joy and happiness. As a new Christian, his worldview genuinely changed so much so that one night he headed to the jungle by himself. He was going to collect firewood. When someone asked him why he wasn't afraid to go by himself, he confidently replied, "I am in my Father's hand. What can happen to me?" Hameyagu had a genuine worldview change that took place in his heart. His new worldview and confidence in God and His Word was evidenced by his new outward behavior. In the past, as a non-Christian, Hameyagu would never have gone into the jungle alone at night. Never! He would have been terrified of the yama. But now, coming into a new and biblical understanding of reality, He rested his life in the truth of God's Word and was set free from fear! He was living unto God as God desired. Hameyagu was never harmed in any way and lives for God to this very day! Praise God for setting people free with the truth! Only genuine worldview change caused by God's Spirit through the Word of God can set someone free from such deep and daily fear.

Another common belief of the Bisorios was that a woman could not eat hunted game while she was pregnant. They believed that if a pregnant woman were to eat hunted game, she would abort the baby. Therefore, out of great fear and worry, pregnant women turned away from eating any hunted game. After joyfully coming to Christ, a Bisorio Christian woman named Fodonome began to experience genuine worldview change in this area. She had a new biblical worldview. She understood that God alone was the giver of all food and that He had provided animals for man to eat. She already had three children. Now she was pregnant again. But she asked, "Who said we pregnant women cannot eat hunted game?" She went on, "It is God our Father who created all things and He created food and animals for us to eat and enjoy!" With new confidence in God, and a genuine change in worldview, she had a new freedom and enjoyed eating hunted game, giving thanks and glory to God. Neither Fodonome nor her baby was ever harmed and both live to this day! Praise God!

Not only does the new believer in Christ have God's Word as his authoritative source by which to judge and assess his old worldview beliefs and practices, but he also gains an understanding of his new personal relationship with God through Christ. No longer is he separated from Christ and without hope in his sins, but he has been forgiven and accepted as a child of our Heavenly

Father. He now belongs to God through Christ! This is a very important truth to understand in societies where one's identity has always been found in the beliefs and practices of the community as a whole. When a person trusts Christ as his Savior and forsakes his old worldview, he will experience some tension in relationships as he no longer finds his identity centered in man but rather centered in God Himself. Indeed, he now belongs to Christ and is a child of the Most High God!

While the new believer's family and community will still be deeply important to him, as he looks at himself through a new worldview, he will begin to evaluate who he is primarily in relationship to God his Father. If genuine worldview change has taken place he will begin to think about his moral character in light of how God teaches him to live. Is he humble? Is he honest? Does he love his neighbor as God desires? How does he treat his wife and his children in keeping with God's Word? Does he deal kindly with others? If genuine worldview change is taking place, these are the kinds of questions the new believer will ask as he evaluates who he is in light of who God wants him to be.

Let us listen to another example of a Bisorio Christian whose new worldview began to influence the way he looked at himself. Maile, a Bisorio man, who deeply loved the Lord Jesus, would read his Bible all the time to find out more about God's truth and how he ought to live his life. He and his missionary friend George would often talk about God's Word to learn about God's desires for his life. One day he said to George, "I am so glad when God shows me areas in my life that need to change." George asked him why that made him so glad. Maile responded, "Because if God didn't show me areas of my life that need to change, how else could I become more like Jesus in my character?" Praise God for His deep work within Maile's heart and mind.

Maile's response showed the deep change in his worldview. Before knowing Christ, the Bisorio people did not interact with the spirit world in regard to moral character development. Not at all. Their main focus in life was about surviving from day to day, not about how they acted as individuals before God. Now, as a new believer, Maile understood the importance of how he lived his life as a man—a human being—before an almighty God. This is a great and significant change in his worldview!

As the new believer begins to evaluate his own life and character, he will of course also begin to address issues that are clearly sin in his life. With a new biblical worldview, the believer has an appropriate understanding of sin from God's point of view. Now, as he evaluates his life, he will begin to see sin from the same view that God does and he will deal with sin in his life properly through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

Hadebayo, who was a very prominent leader and outspoken man among the Bisorios, began to see areas of sin in his life after he became a Christian. At one time he had become very jealous of certain leaders in the Bisorio church. One day, as he was reading in the book of James, he listened to God speaking to him personally when he read, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" James 4:6. Hadebayo had new worldview eyeglasses through which he saw his own sin of pride and haughtiness. God deeply convicted Hadebayo of his jealousy of the church leaders through His Word and he judged his jealousy as sin. He confessed openly to others and found God's forgiveness and freedom. We can see from this example that as believers

begin to see their lives through a biblical worldview, they will begin to see the sin in their lives that needs the forgiveness of Christ and how God wants them to grow spiritually.

Another area of life in which we will see the new believer begin to change as he looks at his life through a biblical worldview is in how he addresses the trials that come into his life. For example, what does he do when he or his family members are sick? Does he resort to his old ways or does he trust in God's ways? How does he deal with death? What does he do when there is a food shortage or disunity among his friends? The matter of life's trials is especially important because so often there are rituals and practices of former, false beliefs that have always influenced how trials ought to be handled. However, a biblical worldview will help the new believer to develop a proper perspective and hope regarding trials, just as it has helped him develop a proper perspective in every other area of his life.

Do you remember the story of Caba who believed he must stay in harmony with a force of nature called Yu in order to have health for his family? But Caba came to know Christ and his worldview changed dramatically. As a Christian, Caba believed that God alone was the Provider of all things and that He was in control of his family's health. He saw that the worldview belief about Yu was not true. Instead he trusted God for his family's well-being and all that he needed in life. This was a genuine worldview change that affected how Caba lived out his life! He was truly set free from the fear and worry of his former worldview beliefs.

Ulane was a Bisorio Christian woman whose little baby fell sick one day. Many of the non-Christians wanted her to practice the old ways of healing by calling for the witchdoctor. But she refused. She had taken some medicine and was trusting God. She prayed to God for His will to be done. The baby eventually died, but Ulane's faith stood firm. She humbly submitted to God's will.

The Bisorios had a belief about babies that also influenced the way they lived. They formerly believed that a new-born child must never be seen by a man out of fear that the baby could die. Only after the skin loses its "fresh-born" look was a man able to see the child.

When Ulane had another new child, with new worldview eyeglasses, she still felt confident in God. She believed that the beliefs of the Bisorios about a man not being able to see the baby was not glorifying to God. So because she had a new worldview she decided that she would allow her husband and other men to see it. She was seeking to honor God with her new understanding of reality. She allowed the baby to be seen and nothing at all happened to the baby or Ulane! They both live to this very day!

Ulane, even after undergoing deep trial, with the loss of another, older child, demonstrated genuine worldview change by her continued trust in God and His Word. This kind of worldview change, as the other worldview changes we have heard, will all work together in helping believers continue to bear fruit for God as His true disciples. In this way God our Father is glorified. As our Lord Jesus Himself has said, "My Father's glory is shown by your bearing much fruit; and in this way you become my disciples" John 15:8.

## The New Church

We have just considered how the many areas of the new believer's life are positively affected by a new biblical worldview. Now let us consider how having a solid biblical worldview foundation will positively influence the believers together as a new church—a community of Christ's followers.

As the new believers form a church body together, they will continue to learn through the truths of God's Word. And just as a new biblical worldview has given them a new sense of identity as individuals, so it will help them have a new sense of identity together as a community of followers of Christ. They will grow together as new believers, learning from God how to love, serve, comfort and exhort one another.

A new life with God and genuine worldview change helped the Bisorios overcome old clan disputes and to begin to relate differently to one another. As their worldview changed, they understood that now together they were members of God's family because of Christ. This new understanding helped them to look at one another differently, and encouraged genuine peace and harmony. This was another blessing of genuine worldview change. God is glorified and honored by this peace and harmony and others are attracted to Christ because of it! In fact, the Bisorios' testimony as a community of believers caused neighboring people groups of different languages and cultures to want to hear God's Word. Praise God! As our Lord has said, "If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples" John 13:35.

Another great benefit of genuine worldview change is that it helps leaders better guide the new church. Because of a new understanding of reality gained from God's Word, a biblical worldview enables the leaders to lead the church body in assessing their former practices in light of what God's Word teaches. This helps the church to better honor the Lord as they seek to live for Him.

For example, during the time of the yabo celebration, the Bisorios used to have a traditional style of singing called wedeme. However, when they became Christians they evaluated that style of singing in the light of God's Word and judged it as being wrong. They judged this way of singing as wrong because of its close association with the spirits. Now, the Bisorios who belong to God have totally abandoned wedeme singing. As a church they have made up their own songs and formed a new style of singing in praising God.

There are many old beliefs and practices that the Bisorios, as lead by the light of God's Word, have judged as wrong and ceased practicing. This has been due to the genuine worldview change deep within them.

Another benefit of gaining a new worldview—a new all-encompassing story of reality based on God's Word—is that it helps the church judge other worldview stories that would challenge God's Story. This helps the church leaders to nurture new believers in spiritual maturity and stability, allowing for a church that is able to properly confront and correct error. A worldview approach in this matter effectively guides what should be confronted, why it should be confronted, and how it should be confronted.

For example, when some non-Christians tried to proclaim another message saying they had visions from the spirit world, the Bisorios stood firm on the testimony of God's Word and judged the other message as false. They gave no heed to it. When some who claimed to be Christians said that in order to be saved you had to do good works, they judged that as wrong too. They clearly saw it as adding to the Good News of Christ. Having new biblical worldview eyeglasses has greatly helped the Bisorio church avoid teachings that would lead them away from faithfully walking with God.

Continuing to grow together as a church body at the worldview level also promotes genuine outreach and discipleship. Believing parents and grandparents are able to share a new story—God's story—with their children and grandchildren. Instead of growing up hearing the old false stories, the next generations are hearing Bible stories. This way of sharing God's Word becomes a way of life and directly affects their worldview formation from a very young age. The Bisorio Christians normally talk about God and His Word in the everyday circumstances of life—in the gardens, while out hunting or fishing, when visiting together by the riverside or sitting around the fires at night in their homes. God's Story is permeating all of life and influencing worldview formation in the old and young alike. They have established communities of believers throughout their entire territory.

Not only has worldview change affected their own people group, but the Bisorio church has also had direct impact on helping other neighboring people groups hear the Word of God. One such group, the Inaru people, was formerly archenemies of the Bisorios. They lived in constant warfare. But when the Bisorios came to Christ, received new life and a new worldview, one of the first things they began to do is pray for the Inaru people. They wanted the Inaru people to hear of the Good News of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ. This was quite of change for former strong warriors! Because of the Bisorios' prayers and testimony of changed lives, today there is a community of Christ's followers among the Inaru! As our Lord desires, the Bisorios have become the "salt of the earth" in their area attracting others to Christ.

Over the course of many years, because of genuine worldview change, the Bisorio church has demonstrated a very positive, godly and powerful influence on aspects of society and culture. To God's glory they have had a deep impact even on such things as bride prices and the legal system. Yes, because of their godly lives and humble walk with God, God has granted the church powerful moral influence. It has become a strong influence for godliness and equity in Bisorio society. The Bisorio church has learned by God's grace and through learning well the Scriptures that they are to be an instrument for worldview change within their own community and to surrounding cultures.

The Bisorio church is just one example of how worldview change has significantly affected the life and ministry of a fellowship of new believers. The benefits of ministry at a worldview level are far-reaching, influencing the lives of individual believers and their ministry as a community of Christ's followers.

### Lesson Review

Let us now review what we have learned in this Lesson.

First, we have learned that when a person accepts Christ as his Savior and begins to form a new biblical worldview, there will be many areas of his life which will begin to change as God works in his heart. He will begin to develop a greater understanding of biblical truths that will challenge his old worldview and strongly influence the way in which he views and lives his life.

We have learned that the new believer will have a new authoritative source for evaluating all of life—God and His Word. He will therefore begin to judge and assess the customs and practices of his old worldview in light of what God’s Word teaches him. He will also gain an understanding of his new personal relationship with God through Christ. No longer is he separated from Christ and without hope in his sins, but he has been forgiven and accepted as a child of our Heavenly Father. He now belongs to God through Christ! He will begin to evaluate who he is in light of who God wants him to be.

As the new believer begins to evaluate his own life and character, he will also begin to address issues that are clearly sin in his life and deal with it properly through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. A biblical worldview will help the new believer to develop a proper perspective and hope regarding trials, just as it has helped him develop a proper perspective in every other area of his life.

We have also learned how worldview change will affect the community of believers—the church. Worldview change will help the church have a new sense of identity together as a community of followers of Christ. They will grow together as new believers, learning from God how to love, serve, comfort and exhort one another. It will help leaders to better guide the new church. A change in worldview will also help the church judge other worldview stories that would challenge God’s Story. This in turn will help the church leaders to nurture new believers in spiritual maturity and stability, allowing for a church that is able to properly confront and correct error. Finally, we have learned that worldview change will promote genuine outreach and discipleship, producing a church that is effective in its ministry for Christ’s sake.

Now, take some time to carefully reflect on what you have been learning in this Lesson. Discuss with some friends what God has been teaching you. Share with one another how what you have been learning about worldviews is influencing your plans for future ministry.

In the next Lesson, we will be reviewing all that we have learned about the implications and ramifications of worldview change.

## **Lesson Eleven**

### **Syncretism: A Great Hindrance to Effective Ministry**

In the last several Lessons, we have been learning about the implications and ramifications of ministering for worldview change. We have learned that when a person accepts Christ as His Lord and Savior he will begin to develop a new biblical worldview that ought to displace his old, false worldview. “If any man be in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away, all things have become new.” (II Cor. 5:17)

However, what happens when a new believer accepts Christ but does not replace his old worldview? What if he only adds his new beliefs in God to his old, false beliefs? The result is something called syncretism and is a great hindrance to effective ministry. In this Lesson, we will be learning about what syncretism is and how it negatively affects the lives of new believers and of the church as a whole.

#### What is Syncretism?

Syncretism is one of the greatest hindrances to effective evangelism, church growth and multiplication. It seriously affects the overall advance of God’s Kingdom around the world. In order to better understand why this is true, let us consider carefully what syncretism is.

As we have said earlier in this course, syncretism takes place when people hear God’s Word and mix biblical beliefs and practices together with non-biblical, traditional beliefs and practices. This mixing of God’s Word together with traditional beliefs and practices tragically results in the continuing of a wrong worldview that distorts God’s truth and the Gospel of Christ. It seriously hinders effective ministry. Because the old worldview is never really replaced with God’s truth, syncretism constantly hinders believers from living according to a biblical worldview. They live their lives trying to serve two different views of reality at the same time. Imagine having one foot in one canoe and one foot in another canoe and trying to travel forward. It cannot be done very well! This is what syncretism is like. It keeps the communities of Christ’s followers spiritually weak and unhealthy and so therefore greatly hinders the spreading of God’s Good News around the world.

In the Philippines there is an island called Palau. At the end of World War II, as the Japanese were being driven out of the Philippines, some American missionaries were with the soldiers. A tribal group there was very impressed with what they thought was spirit power in driving out the Japanese. Furthermore, the Japanese soldiers had been very harsh with the local people but the new invaders were kind and helpful. So, when the missionaries who came with the soldiers started talking about Jesus, the local people responded. The missionaries, who had not had enough time to understand the worldview of the local people, though they were now Christians. However, they were not. They had simply added the now power forms of Christianity to their old spirit religion.

So, for example, to curse an enemy, which was very much part of their old religion, they would go to church, kneel down behind the person they wanted to harm, and curse him or her with the



new power words—words such as salvation, redemption, the cross, and other Christian terms. This was syncretism—merging their old ways with the new religion. The next group of missionaries who came, settled among the people, learned their language and culture, and began to understand their worldview, soon realized that they were not Christians at all. They had not understood the Gospel message except as a power message, which was totally false.

Therefore, they began teaching the people, starting from Genesis at the creation, and proceeding through the Old Testament showing God’s interactions with mankind, culminating in Jesus as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. One day, after months of such teaching, a woman stood up and said, “I thought I was a Christian. Now I know that I never was. I did not understand. Today I turn away from Satan and all the spirits I worshipped, and I trust in Jesus alone to be my savior and my Lord.” That was the beginning of a great move among these tribal people to a genuine understanding of the truth of God’s word. Genuine churches were established that were no longer syncretistic.

Listen to another simple yet serious example of syncretism. One people group called the Yagari traditionally believed that whenever you received something from someone you were obligated to always give something back in return. For example, if you received some corn or cucumbers from someone, you were expected to pay them back with corn, cucumbers or some other kind of food. If someone helped you with mending a fence, you were expected to help them in return with work they had to do. Everything that was received was always paid back in some way.

Now when the Yagari finally heard God’s Word and learned that God had given His Son for them so that Jesus would pay for their sins, the Yagari mixed that truth of God’s Word with their traditional beliefs. How did they do that? They tried to “pay God back” for sending Jesus by paying back through attending church meetings. They tried to do this by continually attending church meetings week after week until they felt that they had attended church enough times and that God was finally “paid back” for sending Christ. They did not understand the true Gospel. As you know, God is not expecting anyone to “pay Him back” for sending Jesus. Salvation can never be earned or “paid for” in any way. So when the Yagari tried to “pay God back” for sending Jesus by attending church meetings they seriously distorted God’s truth and the message of the Gospel of Christ. They had mixed their old beliefs and practices with God’s Word. That was syncretism, and because of this serious error it greatly hindered people from true salvation in Christ. The kingdom of God was greatly hindered from advancing among these dear people.

### What Causes Syncretism?

Now let us carefully consider how syncretism comes about? Syncretism comes about because of a failure to minister at a worldview level. Throughout this course we have spent much time learning about the importance of ministering at a worldview level. We have done this in order to learn how to be more effective in our ministry for Christ. When ministry is not done at a worldview level, it greatly hinders our ministry. It can result in syncretism. This is because when the former, false worldview of a new believer is not truly replaced with biblical truth, the former worldview eyeglasses through which he has viewed reality remains largely the same. His

old understanding and interpretation of reality does not fully change and he is therefore unable to experience a deep and biblical change in the way he views and lives his life.

Let us continue to think carefully about why syncretism happens. There is another very important reason why syncretism takes place among a people when they hear God's Word. There are many different religions all over the world. Many religions with different beliefs and practices exist everywhere around the world. Some religions are more organized and formal than others. These formal and organized religions often have buildings like churches, temples or mosques. They also have writings that are considered to be sacred, like the Bible, the Koran or the Vedas. These formal religions also seek to offer answers to questions people have about man's origins, purpose, final destiny as well as questions about what is ultimate reality and truth. Sometimes these formal religions are referred to as "high" religions. Some examples of "high" religions are Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

Other religions that people practice are different from "high" religions. These other religions are not usually organized nor do they typically have buildings of worship. They are non-formal. They usually do not have sacred writings but rather pass on their beliefs from one generation to another through repeatedly told stories and through rituals, songs and acting out stories. These non-formal religions are not primarily concerned with questions about man's origins, purpose, final destiny or questions about what is ultimate reality and truth. Rather, these non-formal religions are more concerned with questions about everyday life: why their crops have failed to grow, why their child is sick, why their business has failed, who they should marry and what are good methods for attaining good fortune or avoiding calamity. Those who practice these non-formal religions see themselves as being surrounded by different spirit beings and forces. They believe that by appeasing those spirits and forces they can influence the outcomes they desire and will thereby get their answers to everyday life questions. These non-formal religions that are primarily focused on life on earth are sometimes referred to as "low" religions. Some examples of "low" religions are what are often called folk-Christianity, folk-Islam and folk-Hinduism. By saying "folk" before the main name of the particular religion it means that they mix their traditional beliefs and practices with the formal religious beliefs and practices.

The differences between "high" religion and "low" religion are very important to understand if we are to avoid syncretism and be effective in our ministry for Christ. As you live among those you serve, it is important to learn whether the religion they practice is primarily a "high" religion or a "low" religion as described above. This is important to understand for it will guide you in how you teach them God's Word. Remember, God's Word, the Bible, answers the questions and concerns of both "high" and "low" religions. And so if we do not discern whether a people practice a high religion or a low religion, when we teach them God's Word, it will be like speaking a different language into a different culture. If we do not carefully discern if the people among whom we minister practice primarily a "high" religion or a "low" religion, we may promote syncretism by not intentionally teaching them to see that God's Word addresses all of life—questions about man's origins, purpose, final destiny, ultimate reality and truth, as well as everyday life questions and concerns like crop failures, marriage, and sickness.

Therefore, it is vital that the cross-cultural worker teach at a worldview level that addresses low religion areas of meaning while providing answers to high religion questions. The Bible

addresses all of life in a comprehensive way. We must therefore, as faithful ministers of the Gospel, be prepared to minister at the worldview level of the people whom we serve, patiently addressing their low religion concerns and needs as well as answering the high religion questions.

Think back to some of the examples you heard about the Bisorios as their worldview was changing after they had become Christians. As they were learning a new way to look at reality and live their lives, they grew in their understanding that God's Word addressed all of life—both high religion and low religion concerns.

Do you remember Maile? After coming to Christ, Maile began to be truly concerned with the proper development of his moral character before an almighty God. However, before knowing Christ, as was typical of the Bisorio people, Maile was not concerned about moral character development. His main focus in life was about surviving from day to day, not about how he acted before God. He was taken up with the everyday life concerns of low religion. But now, as a new believer, Maile understood the importance of the real purpose and meaning of life. God had taught him that life's purpose and meaning truly matter. Life was more than just surviving from day to day. It truly was important how he lived his life as a man—a human being—before an almighty God, now his Savior and Lord. Because Maile was gaining a new, biblical worldview his understanding of life now also included answers to high religion concerns.

Do you remember the Bisorio woman named Ulame? Ulame found that God and His Word had answers for the everyday life questions of low religion. When Ulame became a Christian, she was faced with the question of whether or not to expose her newborn baby to men. Remember, the Bisorios believed that if a baby was seen by a man before its fresh look was gone, the baby could get sick and die. But when Ulame became a Christian, she no longer believed this was right. Because of her new, biblical worldview she did not believe that was the truth about reality. She wanted to honor God and so let men see her new baby. She avoided syncretism by believing God's Word alone.

Recall the example of Caba's genuine worldview change as well. Caba, too, was deeply concerned with the health of his family. That was a very real everyday life concern. But as he believed in Christ and trusted in God's Word, his old worldview that he had to keep in harmony with Yu was replaced by biblical truth. His belief that God alone was the Provider of all things and that He was in control of his family's health set him free from the fear of his old, false worldview. Just like Ulame and Maile, Caba many other Bisorios were set free from the bondage of syncretism.

### Examples of Syncretism

Let us now consider some of the consequences of syncretism in everyday life. If people are merely adding Christian beliefs and practices to their old, false worldview beliefs, they may never come to Christ and even if they do come to Christ will never develop a true biblical worldview.

First of all, let us carefully note well that one serious consequence of syncretism is that it may prevent true conversion. This is because people will not have a clear understanding of God's Word and the Gospel message.

Remember the Yagari people we heard about earlier in this Lesson? They did not clearly understand God's Word and believed they needed to repay God for sending Christ for their salvation. But this was not the truth of the Gospel and it greatly hindered the Yagari people from true conversion.

In another example, the Dom people, used to offer pig sacrifices to dead ancestor spirits in order to appease them and thereby gain their favor. When the Dom people eventually heard the Gospel, they began to use the symbols of Christianity, like the cross, to try to gain God's favor. They made wooden crosses and began putting them on their people's grave sites. Then, instead of offering pig sacrifices to the ancestors, they began offering pig sacrifices to the Holy Spirit near the wooden crosses at the grave sites. They believed the Holy Spirit would receive their pig offerings because of the cross and favorably bless them! This was a case of syncretism that was very serious indeed. The Dom did not understand reality according to truth. They did not understand God, themselves, or the Gospel of Christ. Though they had heard God's Word with their ears, they mixed it with their old worldview beliefs and, sadly, remained lost without Christ!

Syncretism also takes place among true believers. This happens when a true believer maintains old worldview beliefs that still influence the way he views and lives his life. Listen carefully to some examples that really happened.

A Christian woman went to a church meeting to praise and worship Jesus. She sincerely sang praises to Him, thanking Him for salvation. However, on her way home after the worship service, she sought out a medium in order to divine the whereabouts of her husband who had been missing for three days. Because many of her old worldview beliefs were never replaced, she looked to the medium for help and not to God. Though she had a true conversion, she did not understand God's sovereignty and lordship over all of her everyday life on earth. She did not understand that God alone knew the whereabouts of her husband and that she should look to Him alone for wisdom and guidance as to what she should do. She also did not understand that when God directs his people, He uses fellow believers to give counsel and advice when we face such trials.

In the country of Sri Lanka, south of India, there is a powerful god named Kataragama. When people are in trouble they make a promise to Kataragama, that if he helps them they will offer sacrifice to him. Every year, at a huge festival thousands of people come bearing gifts, usually a coconut or other plant. Some make more serious sacrifice, such as rolling on the hot ground, walking on shoes with nails hammered up so that the soles of the feet are on the points of the nails, swinging from ropes with hooks stuck through the muscles of the back or even pulling carts by ropes that are hooked into the muscles of the back. Even Christians go to this festival. One man said, "I am a Christian but when I have a need I go to Kataragama." This man was syncretised. He wanted the best of both, so he believed Christ for salvation but Kataragama for everyday needs, especially healing.

The true God of the Bible does not accept this kind of belief and living. Read the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Israel had become syncretised. They went to the temple to worship God, then went to the spirit groves and the ashera (poles that represented the sex gods) and partook of terrible ceremonies there. The prophets were sent by God to warn the people not to do this. Eventually, God had to send judgment on Israel and Judah. Israel was first taken into captivity by the Assyrians. Judah saw this but did not repent and was eventually taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

Listen to another example of syncretism that is very common. In some parts of the world it is common for believers to keep the Bible open at Psalm 91 open on a table in their homes. They do this because they believe that somehow magically the Bible being open to Psalm 91 will protect the household from evil. This belief is not biblical, but rather comes from the old worldview belief that they must have a physical symbol present in their homes to protect them from evil spirits. Though they are true believers in Christ, they remain captive to old worldview beliefs and fears.

One time, a Christian leader in the church told a friend that he had seen his grandfather outside his house. The friend was troubled upon hearing that because he knew the Christian leader's grandfather had been dead for three years! What the Christian leader had seen outside his house was a fox. Because he had not yet parted with his old worldview beliefs, he interpreted the fox outside his house as being his reincarnated grandfather. Though he was a leader in the local church he did not have a clear understanding of reality and continued to hold to this erroneous belief as well as any other such false beliefs. How can leaders effectively lead others if they themselves have syncretistic beliefs? Syncretism is a serious issue indeed!

Think of this example. After drinking a cup of tea some Christians will "read" tea leaves in the bottom of the cup to try to predict the future. Because their old worldview eyeglasses are still in place, they do not look to God and His Word alone for guidance, but rather look to themselves and their ability to "read" tea leaves. God is not honored by such practices. Beliefs like these keep believers from looking to the Lord for His rule in every area of their everyday lives and enslave them to unnecessary fears and concerns.

Finally, let us consider one more example of syncretism. Keep in mind that there are hundreds of examples that could be given. These examples are to help you better understand what syncretism looks like in everyday life. In many parts of the world some true Christians believe in a force called the evil eye. They believe that various people have the "power of the evil eye" and can cause harm and misfortune to affect people. This harm could manifest itself in the form of crop failures, failed businesses, sickness or even death. So in order to protect themselves from the power of the evil eye they will hang horseshoes or ropes of garlic outside their home in order to ward off the power of "the evil eye." Instead of trusting God alone, and glorifying Him through that trust, they are still seeing much of life through old worldview eyeglasses and are acting accordingly. As we have said, these kinds of erroneous beliefs and practices do not honor God and hinder His kingdom from effectively going forward in truth and power!

## A Syncretistic Church and the Need to Minister at a Worldview Level

Just as a new biblical worldview positively affects how the followers of Christ act as a church, so syncretism will negatively affect the growth of the church. In fact, the church will not truly grow. It will be imprisoned by its former worldview beliefs. A syncretistic church will be weak, unhealthy and anemic with its loyalties divided and its progress consumed by old fears and concerns. It will be unable to help others or spread the Good News of Christ because it has never truly understood the ramifications of the Gospel. Sadly, what spreads is not biblical truth but rather erroneous, syncretistic beliefs.

So how do we, as ministers of the Gospel, avoid syncretism? We must minister at a worldview level to help believers steer clear of syncretism. Ministering at a worldview level will replace the old, unbiblical worldview through which reality was formerly understood and will leave in its place new biblical worldview eyeglasses that view and understand reality as God desires. It will also address both high and low religion concerns, answering existing questions as well as new ones. Most importantly, it will provide new biblical worldview eyeglasses through which to better interpret, evaluate and relate to every aspect of life according to God's Word.

Let us again reflect back on some examples of how the Bisorios avoided syncretism when they became Christians. Their new biblical worldview guided them in forsaking old, false practices and living lives that truly honored God.

For example, do you remember the fear the Bisorios felt regarding the yama? Before the Bisorios came to Christ they believed in evil spirits they called yama. They believed that the yama were the main cause of death. They were terrified of the yama and lived their lives in constant fear of them. They would never go to the jungle by themselves at night for fear that the yama would eat them, meaning they believed the yama would kill them. The fear of the yama was a common and deep fear among all the Bisorios.

But do you remember what Hameyagu did when he came to Christ? One night, he headed into the jungle to collect firewood all by himself! His worldview had changed so much that he no longer feared the yama. When someone asked him why he wasn't afraid to go by himself, he confidently replied, "I am in my Father's hand. What can happen to me?" Hameyagu had a genuine worldview change that took place in his heart. His new worldview and confidence in God and His Word was evidenced by his new outward behavior. He rested his life in the truth of God's Word and was set free from fear! He was living unto God as God desired. Hameyagu was never harmed in any way and lives for God to this very day! He did not mix his former beliefs with God's Word, but rather lived according to God's Word alone.

Just like Hameyagu, Fodonome, a Christian Bisorio woman, lived according to her new biblical worldview. Before coming to Christ, she, like the rest of the Bisorios, believed that a woman could not eat hunted game while she was pregnant. They believed that if a pregnant woman were to eat hunted game, she would abort the baby. Out of great fear and worry, Fodonome never ate any hunted game while she was pregnant.

However, after joyfully coming to Christ, Fodonome began to experience genuine worldview change in this area. She became pregnant again and she was faced with her old worldview beliefs that she could not eat hunted game. But instead of adhering to her old worldview, she considered and understood that God alone was the giver of all food and that He had provided animals for man to eat. With new confidence in God, and a genuine change in worldview, she had a new freedom and enjoyed eating hunted game throughout her pregnancy, giving thanks and glory to God. Neither Fodonome nor her baby was ever harmed and both live to this day! Fodonome lived according to God's Word alone and no longer practiced her old worldview beliefs.

As we can see from these examples, it is vital that we minister at the worldview level in order to prevent syncretism. Hameyagu and Fodonome experienced a genuine change in their worldviews because they had a clear understanding of God's Word. They did not mix their old worldview beliefs and practices with God's Word, but rather evaluated their old worldview beliefs and practices in light of what God's Word was teaching them. It is very important for us to understand the importance of ministering at a worldview level in order to prevent syncretism among God's people.

### Lesson Review

Let us now review what we have learned in this Lesson.

First, we have learned that syncretism is one of the greatest hindrances to effective evangelism, church growth and multiplication. It seriously affects the overall advance of God's Kingdom around the world.

We have learned that syncretism takes place when people hear God's Word and mix biblical beliefs and practices together with non-biblical, traditional beliefs and practices. This mixing of God's Word together with traditional beliefs and practices tragically results in the continuing of a wrong worldview that distorts God's truth and the Gospel of Christ. It seriously hinders effective ministry.

We have learned that the primary cause of syncretism is a failure to minister at a worldview level. The former, false worldview of a new believer is not truly replaced with biblical truth and therefore the former worldview eyeglasses through which he has viewed reality remains largely the same. His old understanding and interpretation of reality does not fully change and he is therefore unable to experience a deep and biblical change in the way he views and lives his life.

We have learned that the differences between "high" religion and "low" religion are very important to understand if we are to avoid syncretism and be effective in our ministry for Christ. As you live among those you serve, it is important to learn whether the religion they practice is primarily a "high" religion or a "low" religion so that you will be able to clearly present the Gospel in a way that effectively addresses their entire worldview.

Finally, we have learned how syncretism affects the church. A syncretistic church will be weak, unhealthy and anemic with its loyalties divided and its progress consumed by old fears and

concerns. It will be unable to help others or spread the Good News of Christ because it has never truly understood the ramifications of the Gospel.

Now that you have learned about syncretism, take some time to consider with your friends some syncretistic beliefs that may be practiced among Christians in your culture. Identify a syncretistic practice. What are the false worldview stories that are causing the syncretism? Discuss together how carefully teaching God's Story, from the beginning, will help replace the false worldview and in turn help address the false, erroneous syncretistic practice.

In the next Lesson, we will explore the need to understand the various outward expressions of a people's beliefs and their associated meanings in order to know how to avoid syncretism. We will also consider how to guide believers in new, biblical expressions of God's truth in their cultural context.

#### Assignment:

Please discuss the following questions together, either as an entire group or in smaller groups.

1. What kind of questions does a "high" religion try to answer? Give examples of a "high" religion.
2. What kind of questions does a "low" religion try to answer?
3. Give examples of activities that demonstrate "low religion" activities in China.
4. Are there superstitions that Chinese hold? What activities do they do to avoid the consequences of their superstitions?
5. What is syncretism?
6. Are the examples of ways in which Christians in China try to meet the needs of either "high" religion or of "low" religion.
7. Are there cults in China that are actually a syncretism of Christian and non-Christian beliefs? Discuss these on what is Christian and what is non-Christian.
8. Do Christians sometimes hold superstitions that are not biblical? List some of these?
9. What is the world-view that relates to these superstitions? That is, what is the foundational belief that causes Christians to act superstitiously?
10. What Biblical teaching is needed to help them change that world-view?
11. What Bible stories would you use to help them change the world-view?



## **Lesson Twelve**

### **Cultural Forms and Their Meanings**

Greetings and welcome. May God strengthen and encourage your hearts with great joy in the salvation He has freely given. May He also continue to help you learn how to wisely and clearly share His Gospel message with those you serve.

In this Lesson, we will explore the need to understand the various outward expressions of a people's beliefs and their associated meanings in order to know how to avoid syncretism. We will also consider how to guide believers in new, biblical expressions of God's truth in their cultural context. But first, let us review what we learned about syncretism in the last Lesson.

We learned that syncretism is one of the greatest hindrances to effective evangelism, church growth and multiplication. It seriously affects the overall advance of God's Kingdom around the world.

We learned that syncretism takes place when people hear God's Word and mix biblical beliefs and practices together with non-biblical, traditional beliefs and practices. This mixing of God's Word together with traditional beliefs and practices tragically results in the continuing of a wrong worldview that distorts God's truth and the Gospel of Christ. It seriously hinders effective ministry.

We also learned that the primary cause of syncretism is a failure to minister at a worldview level. The former, false worldview of a new believer is not truly replaced with biblical truth and therefore the former worldview eyeglasses through which he has viewed reality remains largely the same. His old understanding and interpretation of reality does not fully change and he is therefore unable to experience a deep and biblical change in the way he views and lives his life.

We learned that the differences between "high" religion and "low" religion are very important to understand if we are to avoid syncretism and be effective in our ministry for Christ. As you live among those you serve, it is important to learn whether the religion they practice is primarily a "high" religion or a "low" religion so that you will be able to clearly present the Gospel in a way that effectively addresses their entire worldview.

Finally, we learned that syncretism affects not only individuals, but also the church as a whole. A syncretistic church will be weak, unhealthy and anemic with its loyalties divided and its progress consumed by old fears and concerns. It will be unable to help others or spread the Good News of Christ because it has never truly understood the ramifications of the Gospel.

Now that we have reviewed what syncretism is and how it affects believers and the church as a whole, let us now consider how to avoid syncretism by clearly understanding the various outward expressions of a people's beliefs and their associated meanings.

## Forms and Meanings

We have learned that syncretism is a mixture of the old, false worldview beliefs and the new, biblical worldview beliefs. When a new, biblical worldview is formed in the heart of the new believer, he will not only examine his old beliefs, but will also examine the outward expressions of those beliefs in light of God's Word. For example, recall the Bisorio people's ungodly traditional dance festival called the yabo. When the Bisorios would perform this dance festival they would paint their bodies in red, put many bird feathers on their heads and sing and dance in a particular way as they celebrated in an idolatrous manner. They praised created things such as animals and birds, and even themselves as people. The red paint, the bird feathers and even the songs they sang and the dance they performed were all outward expressions of their beliefs. To take part in the yabo was to affirm their identity as a Bisorio and their allegiance to their clan, the community and the ancestors.

Because of the centrality of the yabo and all that it had meant to them before they came to Christ, many Bisorios who had become Christians struggled with great relational and emotional pressures when it came time to celebrate the yabo. To not partake in the yabo meant, among other things, denial of what their families wanted and expected. It took much teaching, praying and patient guiding of the Bisorios through this issue before they came to the place of further worldview change and were able to fully yield to God regarding this matter, regardless of the consequences. The yabo was associated with former false worldview beliefs about the nature of reality and the Bisorios judged those beliefs and the yabo celebration as not of God. They ceased from the yabo celebration entirely in a desire to live according to the truth of God's Word.

Now as we continue, let us carefully note that not all outward expressions of a people are associated with old, false worldview beliefs. This is why we must be very careful that we understand a people's outward expressions and their meanings. We do not want to assume that all outward expressions are from a false worldview. Many outward expressions are not ungodly, but are simply cultural ways people express themselves—perhaps a way of greeting someone or a way of traveling together. For example, when Bisorio people who have not seen each other for a long time greet one another, they firmly take hold of each other's right hand and shake their arms up and down very quickly and strongly, saying, "Hiyo, hiyo, hiyo." This indicates that they are very happy to see one another and that they are truly close friends. That outward expression of greeting one another is not associated with old, false worldview beliefs. It is simply their manner of greeting one another as good friends. Other peoples of course may greet one another differently than the Bisorios.

When the Bisorios travel in their canoes, the men always stand as they paddle with their long poles, while the women and the children always sit down. That manner of traveling is not associated with old, false worldview beliefs about the nature of reality. It is simply the Bisorio cultural way of traveling in a canoe and the Bisorio way in which the men transport their families. Other peoples may travel in a canoe differently than the Bisorios. One manner of traveling is not more right than another. They are simply different.

All peoples have many diverse outward expressions in the things they do as they live their lives and all of these outward expressions have a meaning. These outward expressions are called

cultural forms and it is very important to examine them in light of their meanings. For example, when a person comes to faith in Christ, what old forms and meanings can perhaps be retained? What old forms should be abandoned? What old forms may be able to be infused with new meanings? What new forms and meanings should be introduced? These are important concerns in our ministry efforts if we are to be good stewards of God's truth. It is vital that we understand the cultural forms and meanings of the people to whom we minister so that we can have a clear understanding of why they do what they do. This will significantly help us to communicate the Word of God clearly and also help us guide new believers in their walk with God.

Let us consider in more depth what forms and their meanings are. First, a form is an outward expression or representation of something. A form could be a material object, words, actions, dance, colors, drama, architecture, festival or even rituals. For example a country's flag is an outward form that represents the country. The colors, shapes and design of the flag carry meaning that represents the country, its history and its values. Similarly, the country's national anthem is an outward form that is expressed through song. The words, music and story of the song carry great meaning for that country.

The cultural forms of a people and the associated meanings of those forms may represent and symbolize their worldview beliefs. Do you remember the truck driver who worshipped Correa? He offered a bottle of water at the shrine to Correa. Both the water bottle and the shrine are outward forms of the truck driver's worldview beliefs and carry a particular meaning. The water bottle signifies an offering to quench Correa's eternal thirst. The shrine is built in honor and respect to Correa and as a place where people can beseech her blessing.

Or do you remember the Anlo people? They sacrificed blood offerings of chickens and goats to thank the city god of Atito. The killing of the animals, the pouring of the blood out onto the ground and the words of prayer to the god of Atito are all outward forms that express important meaning. Their worldview beliefs are seen by these outward forms of thanksgiving to the god of Atito.

The Ga people, too, who celebrated the Homowo festival had forms within their culture that carried a particular meaning. For example, the priest who prayed over the food before it was eaten, the words he prayed and the white garments he wore were all forms with important meanings. In light of the worldview of the Ga people, the white color of his garments indicated purity, peace and harmony. Even the common people, who dressed in red for the Homowo festival, practiced a form that carried meaning: the color of red signified aggression and that they were in a war against hunger. These forms and meanings indicated their worldview beliefs. It is important to understand that every cultural form has an associated meaning. This meaning is what the form indicates or signifies. Again, sometimes the meaning of the form may indicate false worldview beliefs as we have just noted in the illustrations about the truck driver and the Anlo and Ga peoples.

But, let us to keep carefully noting, sometimes the meaning of a cultural form does not indicate a false worldview belief. For example, among some peoples a person's brother-in-law is never addressed by his personal name, but rather is addressed as "brother-in-law." This cultural form of address indicates respect and honor. In such a culture while, for example, enjoying a meal

together a person would never say to their brother-in-law, “Thomas, would you like more to eat?” Rather it would be said, “Brother-in-law, would you like more to eat?” Saying “brother-in-law” in this particular culture is the proper form to use to indicate respect and honor for one’s relative. To use the brother-in-law’s personal name would signify disrespect.

However, for some peoples just the opposite would be true! If a person did not use the personal name of their brother-in-law in speaking to them it would indicate disrespect. And so in such a culture a person would use a different form of address when speaking to their brother-in-law. They would use the personal name of their brother-in-law and say, “Thomas, would you like more to eat?” In such a culture, the form of using the personal name indicates respect for one’s brother-in-law.

So we can see from the example above that the forms of a culture do not necessarily indicate a false or wrong worldview. Rather, they are simply different cultural forms for properly interacting with one another in a particular society.

The forms and meanings of a culture are important for us to understand for several reasons. First, they allow for clear communication. Clear communication is possible among a people because they share similar cultural forms that have shared meanings. When a people group has a common understanding of life and they use particular forms, they can communicate with each other with respect and without offense.

We must also understand the cultural forms and meanings of the people we serve in order to properly communicate. We must be very careful to use appropriate forms so that we do not communicate the wrong meanings. We must never assume that our own cultural forms apply to the culture in which we minister. Part of learning a people’s culture is learning the forms and meanings of their culture so that we can communicate respectfully and clearly.

### Examples of Forms and Meanings

In light of what we have discussed regarding form and meaning, let’s now consider several examples of cultural forms and meanings in the context of a cultural setting. Let’s compare forms that are practiced in North America and the same or similar forms which are practiced in Papua New Guinea. Carefully note how the forms in the following examples are the same or similar and yet the meanings of those forms are significantly different.

In North America if one tosses an item to an in-law who requested it, perhaps a pencil or some such item, it can indicate one is being rude, disrespectful or lazy. The proper form is to hand the item to the in-law. However, in Papua New Guinea, tossing the item to the in-law has the opposite meaning. To toss an item to an in-law is not disrespectful, but rather indicates respect and honor since close contact is not allowed with in-law relationships. To hand an item personally to an in-law would be deeply disrespectful. We can see in this example from two different cultures that though the outward form, tossing an item, is the same the meanings are completely opposite.

In North America, when one eats food over a paper napkin, it indicates proper etiquette and respect for the host's home. It can also indicate a desire for neatness. However, for some peoples of Papua New Guinea, when one eats food over a banana leaf, which is like a napkin for them, it signifies respect for spirits. They are fearful of the consequences for offending spirits if food spills onto the floor of the house. So we can see from this example that the same or similar form carries different meanings in different cultures.

Another observable form shared by different cultures is weeping at the gravesite of a recently deceased loved one. However, the meaning of the weeping may be different. In North America, weeping is an expression of grief due to the loss of the beloved person. In Papua New Guinea, weeping is an expression of grief due to great loss, but it is also a demonstration of respect to the dead ancestor spirit whom they believe is present and observing those who mourn. The mourners cry deeply to show proper respect for the deceased because they fear the wrath of a displeased dead ancestor.

Just as cultures can have the same forms with different meanings, so they can have different forms with the same or similar meanings. For example, in a worship service in North America, believers worship with men and women sitting intermingled. Men and women sitting together in such a fashion indicates the unity of the Body of Christ as they worship God together. However, in Papua New Guinea, the Bisorios practice their worship service with the men seated on one side and the women seated on the other, separated from one another. Among the Wolamo of Ethiopia, the men sit at the front of the church and the women and children at the back. This is considered orderly and respectful since the women can take babies or children out if needed without disturbing the service. The meaning of this form of gathering (order and respect as they worship God together) is the same in all three contexts, even though in form it is different.

Let us consider another example of different forms having the same meaning. In North America when someone visits the home of another person typically they knock on the door of the home to indicate their arrival. In Papua New Guinea, the person will cough loudly to indicate their arrival. In some African contexts, the visitor will clap his hands to announce his presence. Again we see that different forms can be used but indicating the same meaning.

### Consequences of Confusing Form and Meaning

Since cultures may share the same forms, but those forms may represent different meanings, or have different forms that actually share the same meaning, it is clear that if we confuse the meanings of the forms, it could result in miscommunication and misunderstanding. And sometimes the misunderstanding may be serious.

For example, let us consider what might happen if a person did not understand the meaning of the form of blood sacrifices that the Anlo people offered to the city god of Atito. Remember, the blood sacrifices were offered in thanksgiving for the city god of Atito providing the Anlo people with good fishing. But what if a person did not know that the blood sacrifices to the city god of Atito were for thanksgiving? They may wrongly think the blood being offered was for forgiveness of sins, when indeed the pouring out of the blood sacrifice had nothing to do with

sins. This would be a serious misunderstanding of the meaning of the form of sacrificing that the Anlo people practiced.

Or recall the example in this lesson of the people of Papua New Guinea mourning at the grave of a deceased loved one. Remember, they weep as an expression of grief due to great loss, but also as a demonstration of respect to the dead ancestor spirit whom they believe is present and observing those who mourn. The mourners cry deeply to show proper respect for the deceased because they fear the wrath of a displeased dead ancestor. One might easily wrongly interpret their outward form of weeping as sadness and grief while missing their fear of the wrath of the dead ancestor altogether.

If we do not understand the forms and their meanings, we may easily draw wrong conclusions. Offense may be given or taken. For example, the way or form in which people are addressed or honored carries significant meaning. If we do not take the time to understand both the form and the meaning of the form, we can severely hinder the relationships we are trying to build among the people. This in turn could result in the loss of trust and credibility. We will not have earned the right to be heard and perhaps not get the chance to share the Gospel of Christ!

If we do not properly understand the cultural forms and meanings of the people to whom we minister, we will not be able to communicate or understand things properly. Not only may there be a lack of trust and credibility, but the Gospel message itself will not be clear. Remember the apostle Paul's request for prayer from the church in Colosse after he had been ministering for over 30 years! "Pray at the same time for us as well so that we may speak for the mystery of Christ in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak" (Colossians 4:3-4). Paul understood well the need to clearly understand how the people communicated in their culture so that he himself could minister to them clearly and in a way they could understand.

Paul also wrote, "Even musical instruments like the flute or the harp, though they are lifeless, are examples of the need for speaking in plain language. For no one will recognize the melody unless the notes are played clearly. And if the bugler doesn't sound a clear call, how will the soldiers know they are being called to battle? And it's the same for you. If you talk to people in a language they don't understand, how will they know what you mean? You might as well be talking to an empty room. There are so many different languages in the world, and all are excellent for those who understand them, but to me they mean nothing. I will not understand people who speak those languages, and they will not understand me." (1 Corinthians 14:7-11)

Paul teaches us that if we do not communicate well, our ministry will be futile. From what we have learned in this lesson we see that clear communication involves not only the language of a people, but also includes the various forms they use to communicate certain meanings. If we have not learned well the forms and meanings of the people to whom we minister, our message of the Gospel will be incomprehensible to them—they will not understand God's Word and will not be able to experience genuine worldview change and come to Christ. They will remain without Christ! It is absolutely vital that we take the time and make a great effort to learn the forms and meanings of the people so that we will be able to clearly teach them God's message at a worldview level in a way they understand.

## Carefully Assessing Forms and Their Meanings

When the Bisorios became Christians, they had many old worldview beliefs that they had to assess in light of what God's Word taught them. Remember, George and Harriett had spent much time learning their language, culture and their forms and meanings so they were able to clearly share the Gospel and help guide the Bisorios in their new walk with God. They had taught the Bisorios God's Story clearly in a way that the Bisorios could understand and so the Bisorios also had a solid foundation on which to build their new biblical worldview. When the Bisorios were faced with evaluating their old forms and their meanings, they had a good understanding of God's Word by which to clearly evaluate matters at a worldview level.

One of the old forms of the Bisorios which carried significant meaning for them as non-Christians was the yabo celebration. If you remember, the yabo celebration was a large social gathering during which time all the Bisorios would sacrifice pigs to dead ancestor spirits, dance, and practice wedeme singing. When Bisorios became Christians they evaluated the sacrificing of pigs, the dancing and that style of singing in the light of God's Word and judged it as being wrong. It was all tied to former false worldview beliefs. They therefore stopped the pig sacrifices, the yabo dancing and the wedeme singing because of their associated meanings with former unbiblical beliefs.

Now, although the Bisorios judged the old forms and meanings as wrong, the Bisorios also recognized that the form of gathering together socially was not wrong. Neither was singing in and of itself wrong. It was the meanings that were wrong. Therefore, as led by God's Word, they continued to gather socially as Christians to sing and eat together. That was the same form. But they infused the old forms with new meanings. They created new songs and a new style of singing as they worshiped and praised God. They still killed pigs too, but not to sacrifice to dead ancestor spirits, but rather to eat and thank God for the food He provided for them! So as led by the truth of God's Word and the teaching of His Spirit they abandoned the old meanings and replaced them with new, biblical meanings, keeping the forms of gathering, singing and eating together as a part of their culture.

This is a critically important concept. There are many forms that are good but that have unbiblical meanings or good meanings but with bad forms. Your role as a missionary is to help the local believers think through forms and meanings. If the forms are good but the meanings are not, they may retain the forms but have to come up with new meanings, infused with the Word of God. For example, when young men and women enter puberty, many cultures have "change of life" ceremonies. Entering puberty is a process that all people go through. Having ceremonies celebrating this is not wrong. However, in many cultures, this is the time when young people receive their new spirit guides. Christians might retain the ceremony but reject receiving a spirit guide since this is forbidden by the Bible. Instead of the part where they receive their spirit guide, they guide their young people through a new dedication to God and being filled with His Spirit.

It is essential that we understand the forms and meanings of the people to whom we minister. These forms and meanings are as important to understand as the language and culture

themselves. By understanding the whole system—including language, culture, forms and meanings—in which people live and communicate, we will gain a clearer understanding of their entire worldview beliefs. We must learn to understand all the forms they use and what the significance of those forms are. Keep in mind that forms could be displayed or heard through many different mediums. They could be images, masks, dress, art, dramas, stories, rituals, songs, chants, proverbs or even riddles. While not all forms carry a specific worldview belief in their meaning, many do represent something that the people believe at a worldview level. We must always be aware of this and evaluate if a form carries a meaning that gives light to their worldview beliefs.

### Lesson Review

Now let us review what we have learned in this Lesson.

First, we have learned that all peoples have many diverse outward expressions in the things they do as they live their lives and all of these outward expressions have a meaning. These outward expressions are called cultural forms and it is very important to examine them in light of their meanings. Every cultural form has an associated meaning. This meaning is what the form indicates or signifies. The forms and meanings of a culture are important for us to understand because they allow for clear communication.

We have also learned that many times cultures share the same or similar forms, but those forms may represent different meanings. Or, cultures can have different forms that actually share the same meaning. We have learned that if we confuse the meanings of the forms, it could result in miscommunication and misunderstanding.

We have learned that if we do not properly understand the cultural forms and meanings of the people to whom we minister, we will not be able to communicate or understand things properly. Not only may there be a lack of trust and credibility, but the Gospel message itself will not be clear. This matter is very important because as we learn their forms and meanings we will know which forms and meanings are associated with false worldview beliefs and which ones are not. We can then proclaim the Gospel clearly and guide believers in their new walk with God.

Finally, we have learned that not all forms carry a specific worldview belief in their meaning. Many forms are not ungodly, but are simply cultural ways people express themselves. However, many forms do represent something that the people believe at a worldview level. We must always be aware of this and evaluate if a form carries a meaning that gives light to their worldview beliefs.

In the next Lesson, we will further consider the need to minister at a worldview level by looking at ministry situations of real cross-cultural workers in other countries.



## **Lesson Thirteen**

### **The Necessity of Ministering at a Worldview Level**

In this Lesson, we will be further considering the need to minister at a worldview level by looking at ministry situations of real cross-cultural workers in other countries. But first, let us review what we learned in the last Lesson.

In the last Lesson we learned about cultural forms and their meanings. We learned that all peoples have many diverse outward expressions in the things they do as they live their lives and all of these outward expressions have a meaning. These outward expressions are called cultural forms. Every cultural form has an associated meaning. The forms and meanings of a culture are important for us to understand because they allow for clear communication.

We also learned that many times cultures share the same or similar forms, but those forms may represent different meanings. Or, cultures can have different forms that actually share the same meaning. We have learned that if we confuse the meanings of the forms, it could result in miscommunication and misunderstanding.

We learned that if we do not properly understand the cultural forms and meanings of the people to whom we minister, we will not be able to communicate or understand things properly. This will not only cause a lack of trust and credibility in our relationships, but the Gospel message itself will not be clear. We must learn well their forms and meanings so that we will know which forms and meanings are associated with false worldview beliefs and which ones are not. We can then proclaim the Gospel clearly and guide believers in their new walk with God.

We also learned that not all forms carry a false worldview belief in their meaning. Many forms are not ungodly, but are simply cultural ways people express themselves. However, many forms do represent something that the people believe at a worldview level. We must always be aware of this and evaluate if a form carries a meaning that gives light to their worldview beliefs.

In light of what we have been learning about ministering at a worldview level, now let us turn our attention to a real-life dilemma that cross-cultural workers faced as they were ministering in another country. The following story and letter are real, but the names have been changed to protect their privacy.

#### **The Leniyo People**

What follows is a letter that a missionary wrote in the midst of his ministry among the Leniyo people. He is asking for help to know how to handle the problems he is facing in the local church. As you listen, reflect very carefully on all that we have learned about ministering at a worldview level. Think about what this brother in the Lord has done well. Ask yourself if he has missed some important biblical principles in ministering at a worldview level. After we listen to the letter, we will take some time to discuss how our brother could be helped in being more effective in his ministry.

What follows is an actual letter.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Currently in my ministry location I am struggling with the different ideas the Leniyo church is expressing about sickness and death, as well as ideas about sorcery and witchcraft. I am writing this letter to ask you for help regarding this serious matter.

I moved in among the Leniyo people in 1992. I lived among them, trying to learn their language and culture. During my time of learning I came to understand that the Leniyo people believed their life was surrounded by many different kinds of spirits and powers. They were always concerned about living in harmony with these spirits and powers so that they would have good health, and be successful in the things of everyday life like hunting, fishing and gardening.

I first presented the Gospel to the Leniyo people back in 1994. After sharing the Gospel of Christ many believed on Him for forgiveness of sins and eternal life. They, as well as I of course, were all very happy! The following years I worked hard at discipling various ones. I finally saw the first pastor ordained in 2004.

Currently the Leniyo church is going through some very real struggles in their walk with God. Let me explain. The traditional Leniyo belief is that death is caused by witchcraft and sorcery. For the first several years after the Gospel was presented there were very few deaths, but in the last couple of years we have had many deaths. Recently the talk of sorcery has resurfaced and is being discussed everywhere. The Leniyo currently believe that someone is performing sorcery and is causing all these deaths. Also, traditionally the Leniyo held a belief that certain humans had the power to invisibly enter another person, drink their blood and eat their internal organs in order to secretly kill them. This former belief is also now resurfacing. As in the days before they were Christians, they are once again afraid to go out at night because of the fear that someone might perform sorcery on them. They also strongly fear that humans who can secretly kill others might get them too. They stay inside at night and will not venture outside.

I have tried to tell them that neither Satan nor witches control life and death, but that life and death are only in the hands of the Lord. But many are not listening to this truth. Their common reply to me is to say, "You are an outsider. You don't know about this type of thing."

What should I do? Can you please help me, dear friends? If any of you have words of wisdom, I would appreciate hearing from you. Thank you! – John

#### Discussion Time

Now that you have heard John's letter and the struggles he is facing with the Leniyo church, go back, listen to the letter again taking notes, then pause this lesson and take some time to discuss with each other what John should do. Even though there may be more information you would like to know about this ministry situation, let us consider how we might help our brother in light of what he has written. How would you help him? What words of wisdom would you offer? Think back on all that we have learned about ministering at the worldview level as you talk together.

## Offering Help for the Leniyo Church

Now that you have taken some time to discuss John's situation among yourselves, let us now consider together how we might lovingly offer some help and wisdom to John. Though there are perhaps many things that could be discussed with him, let us consider a few important principles we might share with our brother in regards to ministering at a worldview level.

Let us first be reminded that a worldview is the all-encompassing story through which people understand all of life. It is the eyeglasses through which they see, interpret and relate to every aspect of life. It is absolutely vital that as ministers of the Gospel, we understand well the worldview of the people to whom we minister. In helping John, we could lovingly discuss this important principle with him. While John has understood some of their worldview, it seems from the current behavior of the Leniyo church that perhaps there is more he needs to comprehend about the worldview eyeglasses through which the Leniyo people are viewing all of life. John must clearly understand their all-encompassing story of reality—even if truths from God's Word are being mixed with old traditional beliefs. We could explore together what exactly of the old worldview beliefs remains in the Leniyo believers' hearts and minds and why it remains.

Remember that in learning about worldviews we have learned that the Bible is the only true source of knowledge and wisdom. God is the ultimate authority in the universe and He is the only One who can tell us what is true, right and good for all of life. We might encourage John to consider this important truth regarding worldviews. Do the Leniyo recognize God and His Word as their ultimate authority—for all of life? If they do not acknowledge God and His Word as the ultimate authority for their understanding of reality, then who is their ultimate authority? What stories do they believe to be true about the nature of reality and what is the source of those stories? To whom do they give their allegiance and trust to tell them what is true? Are the Leniyo perhaps trying to "serve two masters"—God's Word and ancestral stories? These are important questions for John to consider. It seems John is seeing firsthand the syncretism that we have learned about in a recent Lesson. The Leniyo people seem to believe on Jesus Christ while at the same time mixing their old beliefs about the spirit world with God's Word.

John must continue to work hard at establishing God's Word alone as the ultimate authority for the Leniyo church so that they view all of life—including sickness and death—through biblical worldview eyeglasses alone. In discussing this important principle with John, we could reflect together how he might carefully and intentionally again teach truth from God's Word in light of the old remaining beliefs. It may even mean that John goes back to the beginning of God's Story, teaching from the book of Genesis to make sure a strong, biblical worldview foundation is in place, further developing a proper view of God, of themselves, of the spirit world, and so on. This will enable the Leniyo church to see that God's Word alone will guide them in how to live their lives even when they are sick and death comes.

Though John no doubt sincerely tried to live among the Leniyo people and make friends, we could encourage him to explore why the people have said to him, "You are an outsider. You

don't know about this type of thing." While we cannot be sure, there may be something that is hindering John in his relationship with the Leniyo. Maybe there's more relationship building that needs to take place. Since our brother has invited our counsel, we might graciously discuss with John the importance of having trusted relationships among the people so that when he shares God's Word, he is confident that they trust him and believe that he understands their lives. Carefully consider: If they do not trust John as a messenger, will they trust the Message he proclaims?

What stories from the Bible could speak to this issue of fear of sorcery, witchcraft, and the spirits? Pause this video and take some time to identify these stories and how you would use them.

### The Yamimi People

Now let us listen to another real-life story from different cross-cultural workers. Again, this is a true story but the names have been changed. Think carefully as you listen about the problems that have arisen and why, as well as how you would lovingly advise the workers to be more effective in their ministry.

The Yamimi people believed they were totally surrounded by a world of various spirits. They believed that these spirits could be controlled by the power of the shamans. Shamans are those who they believed had the ability to contact the spirit world and actually talk with the spirits in order to acquire their help. On a daily basis, the shamans would interact with the spirits, calling upon the spirit world for help in everyday matters like healing sick people, giving success in hunting and helping in various other life matters. The Yamimi people believed that as the shaman interacted with the spirit world, those spirits would do his bidding. In fact, because they believed the spirits obeyed the shamans, they even believed the spirits would call the shaman "father" and the shaman would call the spirits his "sons." All this was a very large part of their worldview beliefs and practices.

The first cross-cultural workers, Bob and Susan, lived among the Yamimi people but did not understand this very important part of what the Yamimi believed about the spirit world. They did not clearly understand their worldview. They shared the Gospel with the Yamimi and some of the people said that they believed in Jesus. But Bob and Susan did not see any real change in the lives of the Yamimi people.

Later, other cross-cultural workers, named Jim and Mary, joined Bob and Susan to work among the Yamimi people. But the Yamimi told Jim and Mary that God's message was a joke and meaningless because it didn't work. Jim and Mary were surprised to hear the people say that God's message didn't work and so they asked the people what they meant. The Yamimi people told them that their children kept getting sick and that Jesus didn't obey the shamans. Therefore they said that God's message "didn't work."

### Discussion Time

Now pause this lesson and take some time to discuss together what the ministry problems may be. What has happened that the Yamimi people would say that God's message doesn't work? What needs to take place so that they will understand truth and not miss the real meaning of the Gospel?

### Helping the Ministry among the Yamimi People

Now let us consider together the situation among the Yamimi people. Though there are many things that we could discuss, let us reflect on the following important principles.

First, it seems clear that Bob and Susan did not learn well the worldview beliefs of the Yamimi people, particularly how the Yamimi looked at the spirit world, themselves as people and the relationship between man and the spirit world. If Bob and Susan were to ask for help, we might be prepared to advise them of this need to learn well the worldview beliefs of the Yamimi. With this, of course, they need to also better learn the language and culture and the forms and meanings of the people. Had Bob and Susan done that more carefully at first before sharing the Gospel with the people, they would most likely not be faced with the present dilemma—people calling God's message a joke and saying it "doesn't work." If they had learned well the language, cultural forms and meanings, as well as the worldview of the Yamimi people, they would have been better prepared to clearly communicate the Gospel of Christ in a way that would have made sense to them.

We might also advise Bob and Susan that as they better learn the language and culture of the Yamimi, they ought to be keenly attentive to the stories the Yamimi tell. Why might that be helpful advice? Remember, we have learned that all peoples have worldviews. And just as all peoples have worldviews, stories are universal among all cultures as well. An important way in which to assist our brother and sister in ministry is to help them understand that there is a very close relationship between stories and the formation of worldviews. This is a very important truth for Bob and Susan to understand because many of the stories the Yamimi believe actually shape their understanding of reality: the origin of the earth, where man came from, what gods and spirits exist, the origin of death, what happens to people after death and many other such things.

All of these stories the Yamimi have about the nature of reality combine together to form their basic understanding of reality. Together they form one big, all-encompassing story that forms the Yamimi understanding of reality, the worldview eyeglasses through which they view all of life. Before proclaiming God's Word to the Yamimi, Bob and Susan should know the stories that shape their non-biblical worldview. This is a very important thing they must do if they are to minister at a worldview level. This understanding will give clear guidance as to how they should teach God's Story appropriately in a way that addresses the way the Yamimi look at reality and live their lives.

We have learned many times the importance of building deep friendships and trust among the people because worldviews are changed in the context of trusted relationships. It would be good to advise Bob and Susan to continue to consciously love, care for, respect and relate to the Yamimi people, even though they have not yet clearly heard the Gospel. In continuing to earn

their trust as reliable messengers, when it comes time to once again share God's message it will be heard from close friends who truly understand the Yamimi people and not from those who seem to be speaking a meaningless message.

Just as the Leniyo people added Jesus to their worldview beliefs, the Yamimi added their belief in Jesus to the many spirits in their spirit world. They expected Him to behave just as they believed the other spirits behaved. They expected Jesus to obey the commands of the shaman. Furthermore, they did not understand that God does not work through a shaman but responds to each believer individually and as a group.

The Yamimi people did not understand God's message. When they heard the Gospel, they totally misunderstood it because strong worldview foundations were not first laid. So they never truly understood who God is, who man is, what man's purpose is, what sin is, how sin is forgiven and many other such important worldview issues. They only understood Jesus to be a spirit being who could perhaps help them in the affairs of everyday life and so they simply added Him to their beliefs in other spirits. They had totally misunderstood the Gospel of Christ!

Bob and Susan will need to go back and lay strong foundations at a worldview level. This will involve teaching new or modified concepts about the nature of reality in accordance with a biblical worldview: who God is, who man is, what sin is, ideas about judgment, redemption and forgiveness. We could graciously advise them to do this by carefully and strategically teaching the stories of God's Word. It may even be best for them to consider going back to the beginning of God's Story for it is in the beginning of God's Word that a new biblical worldview for people will begin to take shape: a proper view of God, of themselves and of the world as a whole.

### Lesson Review

In this lesson, we have learned the importance of ministering at a worldview level. We have looked at the ministry of cross-cultural workers who faced struggles in their ministry because they failed to minister at the worldview level.

From John's letter, we saw first-hand the importance of taking time to build trusted and loving relationships. This is very important. To be able to minister at a worldview level we must relate to those we serve in their cultural context as a member of their community. The fact that John was seen as "an outsider" was a real hindrance to effective ministry. We must earn the trust of those we serve as being reliable messengers of a very important Message!

We also saw the need to clearly understand a people's all-encompassing story of reality through which they view all of life. We saw the need to establish God and His Word alone as the ultimate authority for all of life—even in sickness and death. We considered that to truly establish a solid foundation for biblical worldview development it may necessitate John going back to the beginning of God's Story, teaching from the book of Genesis. The purpose of this would be to make sure that a strong, biblical worldview foundation is in place, further developing a proper view of God, of themselves, of spirits and of the entire world.

We considered that if John were to renew his efforts in building better relationships with the Leniyo people and work hard at gaining a better understanding of their worldview it would help him to equip the Leniyo church to see that God and His Word alone can guide them in how they should view reality and live their lives—even when they are sick and when death comes.

From Bob and Susan’s ministry among the Yamimi, we saw the sad effects of trying to share the Gospel without learning well the language, culture and worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister. Because of this the message of the Good News of God was not clear to the Yamimi. We saw that we must first learn well the language, cultural forms and meanings, as well as the worldview of those we serve. This will help us be well prepared to clearly communicate the Gospel of Christ.

We also saw illustrated through this real-life situation the need to understand the very close relationship between stories and the formation of worldviews. We saw that Bob and Susan need to work hard to understand the many stories the Yamimi believe that actually shape their understanding of reality. This is a very important thing they must do if they are to minister at a worldview level. Gaining a better understanding of the Yamimi’s worldview will give them clear guidance as to how they should teach God’s Story appropriately in a way that addresses the way the Yamimi look at reality and live their lives.

We saw that Bob and Susan will need to continue to earn trust as reliable messengers. If they do that, then when it comes time to once again share God’s message with the Yamimi it will be heard from close friends who truly understand them and not from those who seem to be speaking a meaningless message.

Finally, we learned that before sharing the Gospel again with the Yamimi people, Bob and Susan may need to go back to the beginning of God’s Story and lay strong foundations at a worldview level. This will involve making sure they communicate truth about the nature of reality in accordance with a biblical worldview: who God is, who man is, what sin is, ideas about judgment, redemption and forgiveness.

Since being able to minister at a worldview level is so important for an effective ministry, in our closing Lessons we will take time to carefully consider practical ways by which we can discover the worldview assumptions of any people.

## **Lesson Fourteen**

### **Discovering Core Worldview Beliefs**

In this course, we have been learning the context in which we must learn the worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister. It is vital that we understand that we cannot genuinely understand their core worldview beliefs apart from relationships, culture and language and living among the people.

First, we will never truly grasp the core worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister if we do not build healthy, trusting relationships with them. We saw from the letter that John wrote in the last Lesson that the Leniyo people still saw him as an outsider. He had failed to build trusting relationships and therefore was not able to come to a true understanding of the worldview beliefs of the people. So we must earn the right to speak just as any other member of the community by gaining and keeping the trust of our neighbors.

Second, we must learn well the culture and language of the people. We must have a genuine and personal understanding of the culture and language so that we can come to a clear understanding of their worldview beliefs. Remember, Bob and Susan did not gain a clear understanding of the culture and language of the people and therefore struggled to communicate the Gospel in a way the Yamimi people could understand. So, if we are to have a genuine understanding of the core worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister, we must become fluent in the language, culture, forms and meanings in which they communicate.

And finally, we must commit to living among the people, learning their ways and living as they live. We will never be able to gain trusted relationships or learn well their language and culture—and eventually their worldview beliefs—if we do not live whole-heartedly among them. As we live in the context of their everyday lives as an active member of the community, we will have better opportunity to gain great insight into the core worldview beliefs that guide all that they do.

These are basic essentials to discovering the core worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister. We must build trusted relationships, learn well their culture and language and commit to living in the context of their everyday lives. This will enable us to see into their lives and gain a clear understanding of why they live the way they do.

#### **Some Ways of Discovering Core Worldview Beliefs**

Now that we have considered the essential contexts for discovering worldview beliefs, how do we discern just what the core worldview beliefs of the people are? Let us consider various ways that will help us discover core worldview beliefs.

Stories are one of the primary ways of discovering core worldview beliefs. Remember a story may be a form that represents the beliefs of the people and point us to the core beliefs that shape their worldview.



One type of worldview story that most people groups tell is a creation story—a story that tells and describes the origin of the world, various beings in the world and the nature of their associated relationships, and indeed, the nature of reality itself. Other stories that are associated with the creation story are stories that explain the origin of death, evil, the cause of earthquakes, thunder and other such things. All of these stories weave together to provide a people's fundamental understanding of and orientation to reality in general. They help them form an understanding of their identity, purpose and destiny as individuals and as a people. These stories are the source from which their values emerge, providing their society with a sense of the way things ought to be done and lived out. Through these worldview eyeglasses all of life is viewed, interpreted and lived out. Though these matters are not typically realized consciously in the minds of the people, they still have a very strong emotional hold on individuals and the society as a whole.

Learning the creation story and the associated worldview stories of the people to whom we minister is an excellent way to learn their core worldview beliefs. There is a multitude of beliefs that are developed from these worldview stories—where people came from, what beings and forces exist in the spirit world, how the spirit world relates to the physical world, what causes things to happen in life, how to understand death, what a person's purpose and destiny is and many other such beliefs. If we can learn these stories, we will gain great insight into the worldview eyeglasses through which they see and live all of life. Again, remember that most people are not aware of their worldview beliefs or that the creation story and associated stories help shape those worldview beliefs. So we must patiently learn the stories and beliefs of the people by living among them, listening intently and observing how their understanding of reality influences how they live.

It is also important for us to remember that all worldview stories have an authoritative source. As we have learned, the authoritative source may be ancestors in oral societies, sacred writings in literate ones or perhaps a combination of the two. The authoritative source not only seems credible to the people, but has very powerful influence because of the deep respect they give to the accepted authority, leaving no doubt in their minds that their stories and claims about reality are true. The creation story and associated stories that a people group believe also have an authoritative source. As we learn these worldview stories of the people to whom we minister, we must also discover the authoritative source of those stories. As we do, we will be able to know how to address the authoritative source when it stands in opposition to God and His Word.

We can see that the creation story and associated stories of a people provide significant insight into their core worldview beliefs. We must learn the creation story as well as any associated stories such as those that explain the origin of death, evil, and the cause of earthquakes, thunder and lightning. Together these stories form the all-encompassing story that provides their understanding of reality. We must also discover what or who is the authoritative source for those stories. Remember, the authority of the God of the Bible will eventually be challenged by this opposing authority.

We must learn how those stories are communicated or passed on. What are the informal settings through which they are passed on? How is the authoritative source advanced or promoted? Learning the details and specifics of the creation story and associated stories of the people will

not only help us understand their worldview, it will also guide our evangelistic and church planting efforts when that time comes.

### The Creation Story of the Bisorio People

Let us now listen to an example of a non-biblical creation story. This is a story of the Bisorio people. Keep in mind that George and Harriett, the workers who ministered among the Bisorio people, took much time to build trusting relationships, learn the language and culture and live among the Bisorio people in their everyday lives in order to learn this creation story and eventually the core worldview beliefs of the Bisorios.

This is a story that was told by the Bisorio people's ancestors. The Bisorios believed that the sun was the creator of all things. They saw the sun as a type of being that could think, create, and choose to do things. They did not know what the origin of the sun was. They believed that it simply existed. They also believed that the ground and the sky have always been. The Bisorios said that when the sun began creating things it simply thought things into existence. For example, the sun looked down on the ground and thought, "Crocodiles should exist." And in the way the sun thought, even so, crocodiles came into existence. The sun thought, "Pigs should exist." And in the way the sun thought, even so, pigs came into existence. The sun went on thinking like that and creating things until it finished making everything, including man. After the sun created man, the sun thought, "Who should eat man so that he should die?" So the sun created the spirit beings called yama. The Bisorios believed that the sun created yama to "eat" man so that man would die. This was the story the Bisorios told and believed of how they were created and started as a people as well as how the world around them was created. After creating everything, the sun did not have involvement in the everyday affairs of them as people. They understood the sun to be uninterested and far removed from the affairs of men.

Think of how important it would be to first know this creation story of the Bisorio people before trying to tell them the truth from God's Word, the Bible. Learning this story ahead of time would give you much guidance. Consider, for example, how different God, the true Creator of the Bisorios, is from what the Bisorios were believing about their creator. Far from being uninterested and far removed from the affairs of men, God is intimately involved with His creation, particularly with mankind! There was much for them to learn! One of the things, among many, that George and Harriett did to create interest among the Bisorios to listen to God's Word was to tell them that they knew the origin of the sun. This stirred curiosity among the Bisorios to listen to God's Word.

### The Story of the Origin of Death

Along with the story about creation, the Bisorios also told a story about the origin of death itself. The story went like this.

One day some Bisorios found a tree that grew so high that it reached the sky. These Bisorios decided to climb up this tree all the way up to the blue of the sky. When they had climbed up

above the clouds, they saw six rivers in the blue part of the sky and they believed those rivers could give someone eternal life. So they bathed in the water of the rivers. They were so happy because they now could live forever.

They then decided to gather some of this eternal life-giving water into some bamboo containers and take it back down to the ground so that the Bisorios there could have eternal life too. When they had climbed back down to the ground with their containers filled with the water from the rivers above, they called out to the people, “Forever living ones! Forever living ones!” But no one answered. No one came.

At the time the Bisorios were calling out, there was a mother and daughter walking together through the jungle. They had come to a large stream and because of the sound of the rushing water they could not hear the men calling out, “Forever living ones!” They crossed the stream and continued their journey through the jungle. Just then the men changed their call and began calling out, “Forever dying ones! Forever dying ones!” By this time, the mother and her child could hear the call and answered, “Yes, here we are.”

It angered these Bisorios greatly that the woman answered to the call “Forever dying ones” and so they threw their eternal life-giving water on the ground and climbed back up the tree to the sky. When they had reached the blue part of the sky, they threw death down to earth. The Bisorios believed that when they threw death down to earth from the blue of the sky, they became subject to death from then on. The Bisorios who climbed back up to the blue part of the sky became beings called the sawiyibi and were able to control events on the earth by their thoughts. It was a terrible thing that had happened.

Again, think of how important it was for George and Harriett to first know what the Bisorio people believed about the origin of death in contrast to what God’s Word taught. This was a very serious matter because if the Bisorios did not clearly understand the true origin of sin and death, how could they truly understand the Gospel of Christ? If the Bisorios were not clear on the true origin of sin and death, the Lord Jesus’ sacrifice for sin on the cross would sound like nonsense or would be interpreted wrongly.

These two stories told what the Bisorios believed about the origin of life and of death. It was vital for George and Harriett to know these things because they could understand what the Bisorios believed their own origin to be and even how death entered the world. Because George and Harriett understood this, they could better know how to share God’s Story in a way that addressed the contrasting story and worldview beliefs of the Bisorio people.

### Times of Trial and Crisis

Learning the creation story and associated worldview stories of the people to whom we minister is an excellent way to begin to understand their core worldview beliefs. Another way to discover the worldview beliefs of the people is by observing and listening to how they respond to life in times of crisis. Times of trial and crisis tend to expose worldview beliefs about reality and the ways in which these crises must be addressed because of the perceived nature of that reality. We

must not only be ready to listen, observe and learn during these times, but also lovingly come alongside and help the people in their times of trial. Humbly serving in this way will build valuable trust and support the healthy relationships we are trying to establish among the people.

There are many kinds of everyday life trials that people will face as we humbly minister to them and from which we must try to learn their worldview beliefs. For example, how do they respond when someone gets sick? It is often in such a context that we will have a very good opportunity to discover their beliefs about reality and what causes someone to be sick. They might believe that they offended an ancestor spirit, that someone has practiced witchcraft on them or that someone has broken a taboo. As we observe and listen to how they try to figure out what caused the illness, we might see that they discern the cause through personal confession or the divination by a shaman. And when they try to bring healing, we can see worldview beliefs in their practices: do they offer sacrifices, invite shamanic procedures, give offerings to ancestors or even practice combinations of all of these? Answers to questions like these will open many windows to their worldview understanding about the nature of reality. Remember, it is vital that we interact with the people as they face trials in the context of trusted relationships. As we discover answers to questions about how, for example, they face illness, the answers will guide us in how to strategically and intentionally teach God's Word in a way that will address their worldview beliefs.

Another life-crisis through which we can lovingly help others and humbly seek to discover their core worldview beliefs is during the time of death. For example, we can learn what they believe the cause of death to be. They might believe it is an evil spirit as the Bisorios believed, the word of a powerful man, or some "sin" as they traditionally define "sin." We can learn if they believe someone's death could have been prevented and, if so, how. We might also be able to learn what the people believe happens after death. For example, they might believe that they are reincarnated into someone or something else. They might believe the dead person goes to the abode of dead ancestors or that he stays living in the local community. We can learn much about the core worldview beliefs by observing and listening to how the people handle death: What is involved in the burial ritual? How many souls does a person possess? What is the make-up of a person? What is the normal relationship between the dead and the living? Are there regular offerings to the dead expressing some form of veneration? Is there conditional protection provided against sickness and enemies by the dead ancestors if they are properly honored? Do those living incur punishment from dead ancestors if there is a lack of respect shown for the dead? Answers to these and similar questions will prove to be absolutely invaluable in learning how they understand the nature of reality—their worldview beliefs.

Illness and death are only two examples of the kinds of trials and crises that people will face. We can learn worldview beliefs through many other trials and crises as well, like famine, drought, failure of crops, loss of an important job or anything else that brings difficulty. As we learn in the context of these sad crises, we not only see into the people's worldview, but we are also able to lovingly and deeply empathize with them, thereby fanning a godly jealous desire for our dear friends to hear God's Good News!

### Examples of Learning Worldview Beliefs through Times of Crisis

As we have mentioned, many people's worldview beliefs are exposed during times of death and the various proceedings that surround someone's death. For example, people's beliefs in ancestral spirits are often clearly evident at the time of death. Many people believe that ancestral spirits exist and that they will help those who honor and care for them by performing a proper burial, giving them food and drink and offering incense. And people also believe that they will be punished with sickness if they ignore the dead ancestors. They think that as the living care for the dead, so the dead care for the living!

This type of worldview belief was readily seen among the Bisorios. George and Harriett learned that the Bisorios felt they were often being either punished with sickness by the ancestral spirits or helped by them with crop growth—all depending on the level of honor they showed.

For example, properly performing burial rites for the deceased is interpreted by the ancestors as a show of honor, while carelessness is interpreted as a show of disrespect.

The Bisorios traditionally did not bury people in the ground. They buried the dead on wooden racks, called a laxibu, about three meters above ground. They would allow the dead body to completely decompose. This took about two weeks in tropical heat.

They then carried the skull of the deceased to a sacred mountain and placed it in a cave where the skulls of the departed were kept. This was one of the very important ways to honor the dead. If they did not follow this procedure, they believed they would incur the wrath of the dead ancestors! However, if they properly honored the dead ancestors, then they believed the dead ancestors would protect them from enemies and help them to prosper in hunting and gardening.

From humbly observing and respectfully listening, George and Harriett learned much about the worldview of the Bisorios. They learned the Bisorios believed that once the torso of a corpse had decayed, it became an ancestor spirit being. These ancestor spirits lived underground and were some of the spirits with whom they had the most interaction. They greatly feared the dead ancestors and sought to live in harmony with them. The Bisorios did not believe in a heaven or hell. The ancestors had their own ancestral abode as they regularly interacted with the living. No thought of punishment or judgment after death existed in the Bisorios' worldview. These, and many other beliefs surrounding death, were vital for George and Harriett to learn prior to sharing God's Word with them. It gave them much insight as to how they should teach the truth of God to the Bisorios.

Let us consider another example. In many cultures, diviners are used to determine the cause of illness when a person gets sick. This is what George and Harriett found to be true among the Bisorio people. Listen to how George learned from observing a Bisorio diviner at work. This is only one example.

One evening while George was sitting in his house, he heard a tapping noise coming from his neighbor Yanou's house. He quietly went outside to see what might be happening. Standing silently outside he could observe what was taking place inside. The house was filled with people, but he could still view things from the open doorway.

George was invited inside. He went inside where he observed the diviner at work. It was an old man named Wakeya. He was holding on to the tip of a bow with just three fingers of one hand. The bow was bouncing up and down and back and forth with no apparent manipulation from his fingertips. People were asking questions of Wakeya in an effort to discern who or what was causing the terrible sickness circulating among them. The Bisorios told George the bow was possessed by the spirit of the black palm tree.

When someone asked Wakeya a question, if the bow would tap rapidly up and down it meant that the correct answer had been divined. This session of divination lasted for about an hour. At the end of the session, the bow flew out the window and landed outside the house.

This was not the only way that divination was carried out to discern the cause of sickness among the Bisorios. For example, sometimes in seeking the cause of sickness, the diviner would bite the end off of a betel nut and ask a series of questions regarding the source of the illness: Was it caused by the failure to leave a meat offering for the spirit of wild animals that had helped them in the hunt? Was it caused by offending a departed ancestor? When the correct question was asked, a tear would form in the diviner's eye and roll down his cheek thus confirming the cause of the illness!

Then, in seeking a cure, the diviner would ask: To be cured, should this person spit betel nut juice under his arms and spread it over his body? Should he sacrifice a pig? Again, when the correct cure was divined, a tear would roll down the diviner's cheek, thus revealing what the sick person needed to do to be healed.

George and Harriett learned much about the Bisorios' worldview beliefs through times of sickness. As they listened, observed and respectfully asked questions they began to discover more and more regarding what the Bisorios believed about man, the causes and cures for sickness, and the world of spirit beings that they regularly called upon for assistance. This was a world that kept the Bisorios in constant fear, and one that they sought to manipulate and appease as they desperately tried to stay in control of life's difficult situations. This was part of the worldview "fortress" that George and Harriett would be facing when it came time to teach the Bisorios God's Word. These, as well as many other worldview beliefs, were absolutely critical for George and Harriett to know and understand before ever trying to share the Good News of God with the Bisorios. As the Scriptures say, "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him" Proverbs 18:13. Let us too keep learning well these important things as we prepare to be better ministers of the Gospel of Christ!

### Discovering Worldviews through Religion

We have learned that we can discover the worldviews of the people to whom we minister through learning their creation story as well as through observing how they respond in times of crises. Another important way we can learn their worldview is through how they practice their religion.

Religion is universally experienced and practiced by all mankind. Most people do not separate the material world and the spiritual world and so the way they live their everyday lives is an expression of their religion. Religion is part of every area of their lives. So as they live in their social, cultural, economic and political contexts, their religion influences how they think, live and view reality.

Let us consider some basic aspects of religion that are important for us to learn as we look to discover the worldview beliefs of the people whom we serve. First, it is important to understand that religion is developed from an authoritative story that takes place in a historical context. People believe that their religion has originated from a genuine authoritative source like a particular God, gods, holy men or ancestors that has communicated to humans during real events that have taken place over time in real places. They do not believe their religion is just make-believe or fictitious. A people's religion is intimately tied to their worldview and speaks to the ultimate nature of things including reality, truth, morality and even the mysterious aspects of life.

Religion is very complex. It is a combination of many things including beliefs, values, emotions, practices and allegiances that shape and affirm both a person's identity and a sense of belonging among a community. Religion is experienced in community and is reinforced and transmitted to others by community. Do you remember the story of the Anlo people? Each year they came together at the sound of an iron gong to celebrate and honor one of their gods, the city god of Atito, as an entire community. This religious gathering and the practice of this celebration helped to shape their identity as a people and strengthen their sense of belonging together as a community.

Religion permeates all of a people's society and culture. As you recall, all societies are organized in terms of relationships, having particular customs and practices of doing things in order to live together in harmony as a society. These relationships, customs and practices of a society are strongly influenced by their religion. Yes, their religion which is intimately tied to their worldview, strongly influences how they judge what is right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, holy or profane.

Religion is a means by which people will try to make sense of and manage the many experiences of life. They do this through the worship of gods or spirit beings, through obedience, and through various means of appeasement or manipulation. For most people, religion provides a significant sense of well-being, fulfillment, meaning, happiness, security and assurance. It gives them hope for the present, the future and life after death.

We can see from this brief overview that there is much we can learn about a people's worldview by learning the religion that they practice. We must take time to learn what sacred forms and symbols are part of their religion. For example, what objects, words, colors, sculptures, chants, rituals or events are used as part of the practice of their religion? How do they use these forms and symbols and what do they mean? What story or stories do those forms point to? What is declared regarding the interconnection between man, the spirit world and the purpose of life? What beliefs, feelings and values are communicated through the practices of their religion? By discovering the answers to these questions, we will gain significant insight into the worldview beliefs of the people. All that you discover about their worldview will be crucial in informing

you as to how you should strategically teach God's Word to address that which is "raised up against the knowledge of God" thereby "bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" 2 Corinthians 10:5.



## **Lesson Fifteen**

### **Examples for Learning Worldviews through Religion**

Let us now consider some examples of religion and how we can learn worldview beliefs through them.

One major world religion is Hinduism. It can be found in many countries and is practiced by millions of people. Worship is very important to those who practice Hinduism. Hinduism is very complex with many different forms and with millions of gods and goddesses that are worshipped. Here we will consider only a few aspects of this major religion.

Hindu worship is carried out in temples and in private homes. It usually includes many things such as shrines, images, the saying of prayers and chants as well as drawings of what they believe the structure of the universe to be. In Hinduism temples are built not only to represent a god or goddess but also to house them. The sacred images, housed in specifically and carefully designed temples, are believed to provide a way by which the worshipper is not only able to see the deity, but is also able to be in his or her presence. While a particular god or goddess is central to a temple, shrines to others gods and goddesses may also be found inside or outside a main temple structure.

Many Hindu temples are designed in a layout of a circle within a square that is within a rectangle. Usually there are four gates which indicate the four directions of the universe and are thought to be entry ways between worlds. Before entering a temple worshippers remove their shoes to show respect and reverence.

The most sacred part of a temple is deep within, at the center and is symbolic of the womb. This is where the image of the main god or goddess that is being worshipped is housed. Now though the central shrine of the temple is in direct line with the main temple entrance, those who have come to worship do not have direct access to the shrine of the main deity. They must walk around the temple along pathways in a clockwise direction to arrive at the central shrine. To walk in a counterclockwise direction is considered to be disrespectful to the god or goddess and to be ill-fated.

Because the image of the god or goddess is thought to not only represent the deity, but to also enable the worshipper to be in the actual presence of the deity, the eyes of the image are usually very big in proportion to the rest of the body. It is believed that it is through the eyes that the worshipper and deity communicate. Vibrating sounds, called mantras, are said by the worshippers to call for the god or goddess. It is also believed that a sacred power or energy radiates from the image itself and benefits the worshipper as he worships, believing that he both sees and is in the presence of the deity.

Most people who practice Hinduism worship more in their private homes than they do in temples. Therefore the majority of homes have their own shrines. It is the sacred place of the home. It may be an entire room with images and an altar or it may simply be a plant that represents a deity. Offerings to deities typically include sweets, money and milk as well as the

burning of incense. Worship in the home may take place everyday, but Thursday is usually considered the most favorable day. By these and other things people do, they hope to obtain that which they desire as well as in some cases, become one with the deity they worship.

As you can see from the few things noted here, underneath all the observable behaviors, outward forms and symbols—from the design of a temple to the size of an image's eyes to the sounds worshippers make and the offerings they give—are the worldview beliefs of a people. All these outward forms reveal much of what they believe about the nature of reality: who man is, what gods and goddesses exist, what is the nature of the relationship between them and how worship is to be properly carried out. Though we have noted only a few things, consider how important it would be to first understand these things, as well as many other things, before trying to declare the Gospel of Christ. How different the gods of Hinduism are from the true and living God! And how different the understanding of man and his relationship to the spirit world is from that which God's Word proclaims is true! Without first humbly learning these things about the religion of Hinduism we could easily promote syncretism among our dear Hindu friends and perhaps hinder them from truly coming to Christ!

Let us consider another example about discovering worldview beliefs through a people's religion and its practice.

Do you recall the story of the Ga people and their religious practice of the homowo celebration? The Ga people believe in gods that can give them good harvests in the year to come. Outward expression of this worldview belief takes place when they celebrate the homowo religious festival together. Remember, the Ga people deeply value celebrating homowo in the correct way, believing that they are able to entreat the gods to give them good harvests in the next year. All the people have to arrive into the homes of their fathers by a certain time, the gods and ancestors must be fed before anyone eats, and even as the people eat, the priests have to eat first to ask for the blessing of the gods for the new year's harvest. All these outward forms play a part in revealing what they believe about the nature of reality—what spirits exist and what the nature of the relationship is between the spirit world and them as people.

Recall too how through the practice of the homowo religious festival we learned that the Ga people strongly valued new beginnings. During the homowo festival, they not only begin a new year of harvest, but they also begin a new year of relationships with one another by forgiving grievances of the past year. How they interacted with one another as a community and even how they restored broken relationships is deeply important to them. As the Ga people celebrate together with great joy and participate in the rituals of homowo, their bonds of relationship are strengthened. Again, these observable outward behaviors and forms of celebration—from the color of clothing they wear to the kinds of sacrifices that are offered to their manner of eating and drinking together and restoring relationships—all help reveal their underlying worldview beliefs about the nature of reality: how man and the spirit world relate, how man relates among themselves and how a good harvest is secured. Ministering among the Ga people would require that these and other important worldview beliefs are learned well before sharing the important message of Christ. Their religious practices are windows through which we can look into their worldview.

Now let us listen to one more example of a religious practice of a people and how it helps provide understanding into worldview beliefs. This example is from the Bisorio people of Papua New Guinea among whom missionaries George and Harriett ministered.

Before the Bisorio people became Christians, they had a religious practice called goibo in which a pig sacrifice was offered to appease dead ancestor spirits called sowanaga. The Bisorios believed these ancestor spirits were the cause of sickness and harm.

When a Bisorio person fell sick, the cause was not always immediately known. First, the family of the sick person would inquire of the shaman to ascertain the cause of the illness. However, if he could not discover it, they would involve the sowanaga ancestor spirits through the practice of goibo.

In the practice of goibo, the Bisorios would construct a lone standing wall of stick poles and palm fronds and then decorate it with flowers, shell necklaces and bird feathers. Next, they would dig a small hole the size of a large drinking cup near the wall. This hole was then lined with leaves and filled with ashes. A pig owned by the sick person or a clan member of the sick person was then killed next to the hole by being struck on the forehead with a wooden club. As the pig was in the act of dying, a family member would grab its snout and shove it downward into the hole. This was an offering to the sowanaga. The breath or spirit of the pig, not its blood, was being offered to the dead ancestor spirit as an act of appeasement.

While all of this was taking place, the sick person places a hand on the pig to identify with the sacrifice being offered. The oldest available person would address the ancestors, trying to ascertain which dead ancestor was causing the illness. This was done by calling on the ancestor who died most recently, then working back chronologically to other dead ancestors. For example, he would call out, “Daniya, is it you? Are you the one making Wadaiya sick? If so, take this offering. Eat it and go. Stop looking at her and making her sick. Eat this and go.” Then another name would be tried. “Gabalame, is it you? Are you the one making Wadaiya sick? If so, take this offering. Eat it and go. Stop looking at her and making her sick. Eat this and go.”

The oldest person was chosen because he or she possesses the greatest knowledge of the names of those who have died, particularly of those who died in the distant past. If the person eventually got well, it was assumed that the appropriate dead ancestor spirit was eventually addressed and ultimately appeased. If the person did not get well and died, it was assumed that the offended ancestor was not appeased and that he worked in conjunction with the evil yama spirit to kill the person.

From this story about a religious practice of the Bisorios let us consider some of what George and Harriett learned about the Bisorios’ worldview—what they believed about the nature of reality. Though George and Harriett could only observe the outward forms of the Bisorios actions, words and procedures, they discovered much about the Bisorio worldview through this religious practice.

For example, they discovered that the decorations of flowers, shell necklaces and bird feathers were necessary to properly honor the dead ancestors who were observing them as humans.

Without these decorations the ancestors would feel dishonored and become angry causing more harm and trouble among the Bisorios. So it was out of fear of retribution that they decorated the wall they had built.

Also, by observing the manner in which the pig sacrifice was made they learned the abode of the dead ancestors was not in the heavens or in the sky somewhere, but rather it was underground. That was the abode of the dead ancestors from which they interacted with humans.

Through careful listening, observing and questioning George and Harriett also learned that the Bisorios believed the ancestors wanted not the blood of the pig, but rather the breath of the pig. So they were offering the breath or the spirit of the pig as an offering to the dead ancestors. Only by appropriately appeasing the dead ancestor by offering the spirit of a pig was there hope for recovery from the sickness.

George and Harriett learned many other things as well about the Bisorios' worldview through this one religious practice. How different the Bisorios' understanding of reality was in contrast to the truth proclaimed by God's Word! George and Harriett had gained great insight as to how they should teach the wonderful hope and truth of God's Word into a false and enslaving worldview that held the Bisorios in constant fear and without hope. George and Harriett were so happy that they had taken time to first learn well the Bisorios' worldview before they tried to share the message of God's Good News!

Of course religious practice does not only involve such things as temples, prayers and sacrifices. Let us consider other ways in which a people's religious beliefs influence how they live their everyday lives.

For example, many peoples of the world believe that the sun, moon and stars strongly influence the lives of human beings on earth—for good or for bad. They believe that the positions and alignments of the heavenly bodies can cause good things to happen or bad things to happen on earth. People who hold to this religious belief believe that the positions of the stars and planets at the time of birth determine a person's life-long fate. All the various experiences that take place during a person's life are interpreted through this fundamental understanding of the nature of reality.

Due to this religious belief they therefore live their lives accordingly and seek to influence the outcomes of future events such as the timing of a wedding, when to start a new business, what times to avoid traveling or even how to avoid something that may cause them harm or even death. To gain this ability to influence future events their religious practices include things such as seeking the counsel of one whom they believe can look at the lines in the palms of a person's hands and know the future of that person or they seek the advice of one whom they believe can tell the future by looking at cards called tarot cards. They also often consult diagrams of the positions of the planets to try to determine future events. As they hear the advice from those they believe can predict the future, they make sure they do exactly as they are told. They might, for example, visit a relative on Tuesday but avoid all travel on Friday as they have been told.

So as you may observe the outward form of someone reading a diagram of the heavens or sitting with one who is reading their palms or tarot cards, you can begin to gain insight into the underlying worldview of those people. How different is their understanding of reality from that which the Bible teaches! How different is the practice of those who look to the heavens for guidance and understanding rather than to God and His Word!

Yes, we can discover worldview beliefs through the religion of a people. We must take our time to learn well the worldview beliefs through their religious beliefs and practices so that we will gain insight and wisdom into how we can effectively teach them the Good News of God's Son!

### Discovering Worldview through Rites of Transition

Just as we can discover much about the core worldview beliefs of a people group through their religion, we can also discover significant beliefs through the rites of transition that are practiced among a people group. Most societies divide the progression of life into stages, and mark transitions by rituals. These are often called rites of transition and they transform a person from one level of identity to another, giving them a growing sense of worth and importance in his society. Some examples of rites of transitions in many societies around the world include birth, initiation into adulthood, marriage, and funerals.

There is much we can learn about a people's worldview by learning how they carry out their rites of transition. Just as we must take time to learn the religious forms and symbols of a people in order to discover their core worldview beliefs, we must also take time to learn the significance of their rites of transition to discover what they believe about life and reality. For example, we must learn when the life transitions are expected and what the conditions are under which one makes the transition. We can also learn what rituals and symbols are involved and who is involved or excluded in the process of a transition. What is said to the one in transition, and who says it? For example, what values and beliefs are declared and what warnings and exhortations are given when someone is undergoing the initiation rites from childhood to adulthood? In what ways has the social status of the one in transition changed? What new obligations, expectations and privileges does he or she have? Answers to questions about these and other associated issues will help you see the people's underlying worldview beliefs regarding who they are as individuals and as a community. Remember, deep emotions are intimately connected to these issues. Understanding these matters will prove a tremendous asset in effectively communicating God's Word.

### Examples of Rites of Transition

Now let us consider some examples of rites of transition in other cultures and how they may help us understand a people's worldview. In considering some aspects of rites of transitions, let us begin by looking at a rite of transition relative to birth and becoming human.

All peoples make a distinction between humans, animals or plants. But when are newborn babies considered to be truly human? How do the people among whom you minister answer this

question? The answer to this question will open important windows of understanding into a people's worldview.

For example, a people group called the Samo believes that life is given when an ancestral spirit enters the newborn's body at birth. That is what gives the newborn its life. However, the newborn is not fully human until it has teeth and can walk and talk. This takes about three years. During this time period the family seeks to determine which ancestral spirit has given life to the child. Once that is determined the child receives that ancestor's name and becomes a member of the family. This rite of transition from birth to becoming truly human takes three years and is based on man's assessment!

How different from the biblical understanding of what it means to be human. We are all—male and female—created in the “image of God.” And as David, king of Israel, wrote under God's inspiration, “You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because you are to be feared; all you do is strange and wonderful. I know it with all my heart. When my bones were being formed, carefully put together in my mother's womb, when I was growing there in secret, you knew that I was there—you saw me before I was born” Psalm 139:13-16. We can learn much about the worldview beliefs of a people by learning more about the rites of transition, including those that surround birth and becoming human.

Now let us listen carefully to another illustration of a rite of transition. This example is regarding the rite of transition of a young boy into manhood from the Waxe people of Papua New Guinea.

A young boy among the Waxe people will endure great pain to be considered a man in his culture. Every few years the shaman who cares for the spirit house and the spirit carvings will send word to the villages that it is time to perform an initiation. The boys, between 12 and 18 years of age, then make a long hike into the traditional sacred mountains of the Waxe. As difficult as the hike is, it is nothing compared to the pain they will experience over the next days. After spending several days singing and dancing to the spirits in the smoke-filled initiation house, the first young boy is brought forward by the men of the village. He is laid on his stomach, arms reaching upward, then men hold his arms and legs to keep him from moving during the act of initiation. Another man rubs a stinging leaf along the back of his legs to distract him from the pain of the sharpened bamboo knife. Carefully the shaman makes a series of small cuts on the boy's back in the pattern of a crocodile's back. Blood flows freely. Then the shaman takes a mixture of ash and ground and stuffs some into each cut, raising the skin to give it the appearance of the raised bumps on the back of a crocodile.

After dozens of cuts are made and bumps created, and the shaman is satisfied with his design, the process is complete. The initiate, now a man, is in such pain that he does not move. His close male relatives will wipe away the blood and do their best to ease his pain. Yet, it will still be several days before he can move freely and without pain. Infection will almost surely set in.

Now the blood of his mother, flowing in him since birth, has been drained from his body. He is now a man. His mother's blood will weaken him no more. For the rest of his life he will carry the marks of the crocodile on his back, but he will consider the pain worthwhile. The strong spirit of the crocodile will be with him to protect him wherever he goes.

From this rite of transition into adulthood, we learn much about the Waxe's worldview. For example, we see that their view of the nature of reality includes a belief that a male's association with his mother and her blood makes him weak both physically and spiritually. He must be released from that association. They believe that the shaman has the spiritual power to secure that release. Also, they believe that the spirit world—in this case, the spirit of the crocodile—will be that which protects and watches over the initiate, now a man.

How different indeed is the Waxe worldview from a true biblical worldview. But please note carefully that it is through the rite of transition from childhood to adulthood that important aspects of their worldview are discovered.

There are other rites from which much can be learned such as rites that surround marriage and funerals. These are times when much can be learned about a people's worldview beliefs because it is during these times that a people's values and beliefs are often openly and clearly declared to those in transition. For example, during the marriage rites a Bisorio man is told how to be a good Bisorio husband by being a good hunter and gardener. He is warned against being lazy. A Bisorio woman is told about being a good Bisorio wife by working hard in gardening, taking good care of her husband and children and not being disobedient to her husband's wishes. These exhortations are all surrounded with warnings of retribution from the yama, the evil spirit that they believed had the power of death!

Yes, major transitions of life are important, affecting a person's identity, social status and overall meaning in life. They reveal much about a people's values, their hopes and what they believe to be the ultimate nature of reality. It is the wise and careful minister of the Gospel who takes time to learn the worldview beliefs of a people from their various rites of transition.

### Lesson Review

Now let us review what we have learned in this Lesson.

First, we have learned that religion is another way we can discover the core worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister. We have learned that religion is developed from an authoritative story that the people genuinely believe. Religion is a combination of beliefs, values, emotions, practices and allegiances that shape and affirm both a person's identity and a sense of belonging among a community. Religion also permeates all of a people's society and culture. As we see a people's religion being lived out in everyday life and as we observe the rituals, symbols and forms that represent their religion, we will see that their religion which is intimately tied to their worldview, strongly influencing how they judge what is right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, holy or profane. All that we are able to discover about their religion—and therefore their worldview beliefs—will be absolutely vital in guiding how we should strategically teach them God's Word.

We have also learned that there is much we can learn about a people's worldview by learning the how they carry out their rites of transition. Remember, most societies divide the progression of

life into stages and mark these transitions by rituals. These transitions are called rites of transition and they transform a person from one level of identity to another, giving them a growing sense of worth and importance in his society. Some examples of rites of transitions in many societies around the world include the life transition into birth, initiation into adulthood, marriage, and funerals. Often rites of transition are celebrated with rituals that give light into the worldview beliefs of the people. These major transitions of life are important, affecting a person's identity, social status and overall meaning in life. As we observe their rites of transition, how they carry them out and what they believe about the various life stages, we will gain valuable insight into a people's values, their hopes and what they believe to be the ultimate nature of reality. We must be wise to take the time to learn the worldview beliefs of the people through their various rites of transition in order to wisely share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the next Lesson, we will continue to learn how to discover core worldview beliefs through the events and concerns of people's everyday lives.



## **Lesson Sixteen**

### **Discovering Worldviews through Everyday Life Affairs**

During this Lesson, we will be learning how to discover core worldview beliefs through the affairs of the everyday lives of the people to whom we minister. But first let us review what we learned in the last Lesson.

In the last Lesson we learned the significance of learning the core worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister through their religion and through their rites of transition. First, we learned that a people's religion is developed from an authoritative story that the people genuinely believe. It is a combination of beliefs, values, emotions, practices and allegiances that shape and affirm both a person's identity and a sense of belonging among a community. A people's religion also permeates all of their society and culture. As we see a people's religion being lived out in everyday life and as we observe the rituals, symbols and forms that represent their religion, we will see that their religion which is intimately tied to their worldview, strongly influences how they judge what is right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, holy or profane. All that we are able to discover about their religion—and therefore their worldview beliefs—will be absolutely vital in guiding how we should strategically teach God's Word.

We also learned that there is much we can learn about a people's worldview by learning how they carry out their rites of transition. Remember, most societies divide the progression of life into stages and mark these transitions by rituals. These transitions are called rites of transition and they transform a person from one level of identity to another, giving them a growing sense of worth and importance in his society. Some examples of rites of transitions in many societies around the world include the life transition from birth to being recognized as fully human, initiation into adulthood and the transition from being single to becoming married. Often rites of transition are celebrated with rituals that give light into the worldview beliefs of the people. These major transitions of life are important, affecting a person's identity, social status and overall meaning in life. As we observe their rites of transition, how they carry them out and what they believe about the various life stages, we will gain valuable insight into a people's values, their hopes and what they believe to be the ultimate nature of reality. We must be wise to take the time to learn the worldview beliefs of the people through their various rites of transition in order to wisely share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are many other ways we can discover the worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister. We can learn their worldview beliefs through the proverbs and riddles they tell as well as through the affairs of their everyday lives.

## Learning Worldviews through the Affairs of Everyday Life

As we consider how we might begin to discover the worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister through the affairs of everyday life, it is vital that we remember how worldviews are formed in the first place. Remember, when worldviews are formed, they are not learned in a formal, educational setting. People do not study different worldviews and then decide which one they want to view reality through. No, worldviews are formed in the informal settings of everyday life. People's worldviews are developed from the very beginning of childhood as they listen to stories, as they experience relationships, as they feel emotions and practice customs within their community. Their worldviews are formed through what they hear and see modeled and through interaction and imitation of what they hear and see. Therefore, we must be careful to observe, listen to and interact with the people in their everyday lives so that we can see both how worldviews are forming and what the worldview beliefs are.

As we live alongside the people in their everyday lives, we can learn the contexts in which their everyday affairs are discussed. Perhaps they gather in their homes in the mornings or around the fire after the sun has gone down. Maybe the women talk about their everyday concerns as they wash their clothes or tend their gardens. Perhaps the men talk among themselves as they hunt or maybe they set up special meetings to discuss important topics. We can learn what their everyday concerns are by listening to them talk about the way things ought to be, that is, the values they hold that are based on their worldview beliefs. Living in the everyday context of the people puts us in a place to gain genuine worldview understanding by listening and observing their everyday life affairs.

We can also begin to discover their worldview beliefs by learning what the affairs of their everyday lives are. Perhaps they are concerned if they will have food to eat. Perhaps they spend time discussing their gardens or hunting trips. By listening carefully, we might be able to learn how they handle clan disputes, what they believe about selfish neighbors or what their opinions are about arrogant leaders. As we interact with them in daily life, we can learn how they talk about their sick children and what they believe will make them better. Perhaps we might join a conversation in which they discuss how their children are growing and if they are being obedient. The everyday concerns that people discuss are quite often connected to what they believe about reality. For example, when discussing a failed hunting expedition, a group of men might talk about the how an ancestor spirit must have been offended. Or if a child is burning up with fever, the family might discuss an enemy who is surely performing sorcery to inflict illness on the child. By learning what is important to them and what they are concerned about day to day, we will be better able to gain insight into their worldview beliefs.

We might also learn about a people's everyday life affairs by listening to how they are discussed. It will be important that we pay close attention to the language that is used and the emotions and attitudes that are expressed. By learning the concepts that they express, we will be better able to understand their everyday affairs and what is important to them.

Oftentimes, the affairs of everyday life are directly tied to the material and social worlds. In fact, these are the very worlds from which the Lord Jesus drew most of his teaching illustrations and parables. He used these stories to help people understand the heart of the matter at a worldview level. In order to effectively speak 'to the hearts' of the people, we need to know how to address

these affairs of their everyday lives by using language and illustrations they understand. We must learn well their language, culture and forms in order to do this. Just as our Lord Jesus did, we, too, can steer these everyday issues toward deeper concerns at the worldview level. Gaining understanding of values and underlying worldview assumptions through these affairs of everyday life will help us to acquire important insight while we build genuine friendships and let them know that we, too, are a part of their community.

### Examples of Learning Worldviews through Everyday Life Affairs

Let us now consider some examples of how we can learn the worldviews of the people through the affairs of their everyday lives.

First, let us consider a child learning his mother tongue. An infant child does not sit in educational courses to learn how to speak to his mother and father. No, a child learns his mother tongue by listening to the sounds his parents and other family members make and eventually imitating their words. The child is not aware that he is learning a language—he unconsciously is learning how to communicate in the same way that his family does. But the child is not only learning language from his family. He is also learning worldview beliefs—though unconsciously—as he is learning language. For example, the mother will use the language to teach the child how to sit properly or how to speak to his elders. Tied to these values that the child is being taught are often worldview beliefs that will likely also be communicated. The exhortations and lessons that a mother teaches her child are often learned in the context of warning about the repercussions of the spirit world. If the child does not behave in the right way, he might upset the spirit world and bring calamity on himself or his family. So we can learn much about the worldview beliefs of the people even by observing the children learning in the presence of their family.

In another example, consider a Bisorio son who is watching his father make a dugout canoe. As his father carves the canoe, the son watches how he digs out the inside of the tree and shapes it into a canoe for the water. At the front of the canoe, the father carves a crocodile head and the son learns that this is to protect them from malicious water spirits as they travel the river. So not only is the son learning how to make a canoe as he observes and participates with his father, his worldview beliefs about the spirit world are also being developed. We, too, can learn these worldview beliefs of the people we serve as we participate in these affairs of their everyday lives.

Consider another illustration. George, the missionary among the Bisorios, was traveling on the jungle trail one day with his Bisorio friend, Ifanime. Suddenly, Ifanime stopped and began to talk to two parrots roosting in a tree up above them. Ifanime told George that the parrots were reincarnated ancestors who were inquiring as to who George was and what he was doing there. Ifanime assured the parrots that George was friendly. He told them that George was with him and therefore George was acceptable to the ancestors. Ifanime did this to avoid angering the ancestors.

We can see through this everyday affair of walking through the jungle that we can learn about the worldview beliefs of the people. In this walk with Ifanime, George learned that the Bisorios believed that their ancestors were reincarnated and that it was important to keep friendly company. It was vital that they not anger the ancestors and therefore bring bad fortune to themselves. Yes, through the everyday affairs of life, we can learn significant things about the worldview beliefs of the people.

Let us consider one more example of how worldview beliefs significantly influence everyday life affairs and how we might learn those beliefs by observing how the people handle their everyday lives.

The Bisorios believed in a powerful impersonal, amoral force that they believed permeated everything—man, animals, and inanimate objects. They called this impersonal force “mana.” Mana deeply affected what was believed about the nature of reality and the way all things functioned. It involved aspects of respect and authority, as well as concepts of the way things should be done.

Now when a Bisorio parent was upset with a disobedient child, they would complain with real emotional concern saying, “He doesn’t obey mana!” The parent was expressing worried concern that the child was not doing things in the proper, respectful way in which they should be done. The parent was deeply concerned about the harmful consequences that would come upon the child for not living in harmony with mana.

So we can see even from this saying that was often uttered in response to disobedient children that the Bisorios had a particular belief about how life ought to be lived out. Obeying mana in this way carries the idea of doing things properly in life, with respect, so that things will go well for the person. It involves the attainment of success and the avoidance of ill effects, all dependent upon their ability to live in harmony with mana. The Bisorios would say that there was a proper, respectful way to interact with certain areas of life. They would say, “There is mana,” meaning that there is a proper, respectful way of doing this or that. If the act was done in accordance with mana, benefit and success would follow. If one violated mana, however, one could only expect harmful consequences to befall him. George and Harriett learned these worldview beliefs of the Bisorios by living among them, listening carefully as they interacted with their children and by being a part of their everyday life affairs.

It is evident from these examples that there is much we can learn as we observe and listen to the affairs of everyday life of the people to whom we minister. As we are able to learn the importance of their everyday affairs, that is, what matters to them, we will gain valuable insight into their worldview beliefs.

### Learning Core Worldview Beliefs through Proverbs and Riddles

Another important way to learn the core worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister is by listening to and learning the proverbs and riddles that are common among them. Many cultures that pass their stories on through oral tradition are often proverb-oriented. Many times, proverbs that are common among a people are in the form of riddles and will hide their meaning

from outsiders while those within the culture will know exactly what the meaning is. Other proverbs teach very clear and obvious aspects of cultural beliefs. Understanding both kinds of proverbs will be a valuable tool in learning worldview beliefs.

Some proverbs will reveal specific things about a culture or a worldview that is common among the people. For example, the Kipsigis people have a proverb that literally means, “My ancestral spirits are not tied to yours.” What they mean by this saying is that my ancestral spirits cannot harm you and your ancestral spirits cannot harm me. So we can learn from this that the Kipsigis believe that every person is in control of his own ancestral spirits. This is a significant worldview belief that we can learn just from understanding well this proverb.

It is important to realize that many cultures have different proverbs that teach the same thing. For example, in Matthew 6:24, the Lord Jesus teaches us that no one can serve two masters. In some cultures, people will correctly express this truth in a proverb that says, “One cannot follow two different roads simultaneously.” In other words, one cannot follow the way of God and the way of their ancestors at the same time. Even other cultures will express this teaching in different ways. For example, the Kipsigis people say, “Two walking sticks cannot be burned together,” while the Bukusu people say, “He who wants to start a new home must destroy the old.” Another culture says this proverb in the form of a question: “Can a woman marry two husbands?” All of these sayings mean the same thing: that no one can serve two masters.

In another example of how a proverb gives light to the worldview beliefs of a people group, the Kipsigis people say, “A baboon does not forget how to jump.” The Kipsigis people use this proverb to describe that a Kipsigis person cannot forget how to practice the things that are natural to him. In other words, he cannot forget how to practice the traditional rites of his own people. By this proverb, the Kipsigis reveal aspects of what they believe about the nature of reality for them as a people.

It is vital again to note that we must be living intimately among the people to discover these proverbs and riddles that are common among them. We must learn what their proverbs mean and in what contexts they are used. It is also important to learn who should address whom and the values and beliefs that are being conveyed. For example, the Bisorios have a saying that literally means, “His heart is not within me.” In saying that, they mean no one can know what someone else is thinking and each person is responsible for his own choices. As you can imagine, it is absolutely vital that we know well the language and culture of the people in order to interpret and understand sayings, proverbs and riddles that can often be difficult and foreign to us. As we learn proverbs, riddles and sayings we will be better able to follow conversations about vital issues as they are being discussed by the people to whom we are ministering. It will be very important for us to be able to talk as they talk and understand and they understand so that we do not seem like foreigners but rather like one of their own. Remember, they will relate to each other on vital issues in the midst of a mutually held worldview. We must learn the way in which they communicate so that when it comes time to share the Gospel, we will have a clear understanding of how they communicate and the worldview beliefs that are communicated through their sayings. Gaining this important understanding will help us to communicate the Gospel of Christ at a worldview level.

## Lesson Review

Let us now review what we have learned in this Lesson.

We have learned that we can discover worldview beliefs through the everyday life affairs of the people. As we live alongside the people in their everyday lives, we can learn what their everyday affairs are, how they are discussed and the contexts in which they are discussed—whether it is visiting in their homes, working in their fields or quietly walking together along a path. These various experiences will help give us valuable insight into the worldview beliefs of the people.

We have also learned the importance of listening to and learning the proverbs and riddles that are common among the people whom we serve. We must learn what their proverbs mean and in what contexts they are used. It is also important to learn who should address whom and the values and beliefs that are being conveyed.

We have learned many ways of discovering the worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister in the last few Lessons. These are all very important. Remember, we must live among them in order to learn well these things and therefore to learn well their worldview beliefs. By doing this, we will be better and more effective ministers of the Gospel of our Lord.

As you reflect on these things, gather together with some friends and consider some everyday affairs in which you can discover worldview beliefs within your own culture. Take your time as you carefully consider these important matters before the Lord.

In the next Lesson, we will review all that we have learned throughout this course.

## **Lesson Seventeen**

### **Reflecting Together about Ministering at a Worldview Level**

In this course we have learned many things about ministering at a worldview level. In this Lesson we will review together all that we have learned about worldviews and ministering at a worldview level. May you be encouraged in your preparation for ministry as we reflect together on what we have learned about being effective ministers to a people who do not know Christ as their Lord and Savior!

When we began this course, we learned the importance of laying a strong foundation for effective ministry for God. In the same way that a man carefully builds his house by first laying a strong foundation so that the rest of his house can be securely built and not topple over, throughout this course we have begun to lay a solid foundation for an effective and lasting ministry.

Above all, we must remember that it is God's Word alone that tells us what things are right or wrong, true or false, important or unimportant. Throughout this course, we have looked to what God's Word teaches us about our need to be prepared for serving Him by understanding worldviews so that we can effectively minister and see God's truth affect every aspect of peoples' lives and culture.

#### **What Worldviews Are**

We began this course by learning that a worldview is the way a person looks at the world and at life. We also learned that everyone has a worldview. It does not matter where they live, what religion they practice or what language they speak, all people have a worldview. Those worldviews deeply influence how people act in all areas of life—what they value, how they interact with others and how they relate to God.

Do you remember the story about the Anlo people? Through the story of the Anlo people, we learned that a people's worldview strongly influences their values and the way they live within their culture and society. The Anlo people believe the nature of reality consists of the sky-god Mawu-Lisa who created the trowo deities to interact with humans. We learned that the Anlo people deeply value pleasing the trowo in order to have health and prosperity in their lives. They set up a festival to honor the city god of Atito and they sacrificed blood offerings to appease him. By doing this together as a community, they strengthen their identity as a group and as individuals, knowing that their practices are for the good of the entire people group. The Anlo people hold their beliefs with great emotion and as they carry out their customs together, their worldview assumptions are strengthened.

We have also learned that there is a very close relationship between worldview formation and stories. Do you remember why? God has designed His creation to live in harmonious relationships—with Him and with one another. And it is stories that powerfully communicate in the context of relationships! Because God made reality to be centered in relationships, stories are one of the most powerful means God has used to teach us and communicate with us. In fact, God

inspired most of His Word, the Bible, to be written in stories. He Himself uses stories in His Word to teach us truth and to give the strong foundation for our worldview formation. He uses stories because stories are a powerful means of communicating in the context of relationships. Therefore, stories can capture our imaginations, shape our perceptions, communicate values and stir our emotions. Stories can affect a person's understanding of certain aspects of life and even the choices they make. They make effective communication and understanding easier.

God's Son, Jesus Christ, taught through stories in order to help people better understand how to have a true and proper worldview. Do you remember the story Jesus told about the Good Samaritan? There was a man who was robbed and beaten. Two Jewish religious leaders, a priest and a Levite, passed by him and did not help him. But a Samaritan, who was despised by the priests, the Levites and the experts in the Law, stopped and cared for the man until he was well. He had a proper worldview. The religious leaders of the Jews thought Samaritans were a mixed race and did not properly understand God and His ways. But in Jesus' story the Samaritan did understand God and His ways! He was in a proper relationship with God and had a proper perspective before Him. He understood that the traveler who had been robbed and beaten, regardless of his ethnicity, was his neighbor and God desired that he relate to him lovingly. What did we learn through this story? We learned that God desires us to view ourselves, others and Him in a proper way. His desire is that we look through worldview eyeglasses that see others with the compassion and love He has for us—regardless of a person's race, language or culture.

### Implications of Ministering at a Worldview Level

We have also learned about the implications of ministering at a worldview level, meaning what it is going to cost you to minister at a worldview level. In the same way you work very hard in your garden so that you will get a good crop, you must also work very hard at ministering at a worldview level. We must learn well the language and culture of the people to whom we minister. We can do this by living alongside them and participating in their everyday lives. As we listen and learn the words, gestures and cultural meanings of their language as well as the informal means of communication, we will be able to clearly communicate the Gospel of Christ in a way that will make sense to them. We need to build deep friendships and trust among the people. Worldviews are changed in the context of trusted relationships. Therefore we must consciously love, care for, respect and relate to those to whom we desire to minister in their everyday lives. By doing this, we will build a trust that enables us to share the Gospel with people who will have hearts to hear a message from their friends.

We have also learned that worldviews are like eyeglasses. A worldview is the eyeglasses through which one looks at the world and at life. A person's worldview consists of the many beliefs he has about reality. A person's beliefs about reality include his beliefs about who God is, who he himself is, who others are, what spirits exist and how these important relationships work. Together these beliefs about reality form the eyeglasses through which a person sees the world and relates to all of life.

As we further considered what worldviews are, we learned that the worldview beliefs people have are formed from a combination of the many stories that people tell about the nature of



reality that together form one all-encompassing story of reality. All peoples have stories about the nature of reality: the origin of the earth, who they are as a people and where they came from, what gods and spirits exist, the origin of death, where thunder and lightning come from, what happens to people after death and many other such things. This all-encompassing story forms the worldview eyeglasses through which they interpret all of life.

We must learn well the all-encompassing story that shapes the worldview of the people to whom we minister. We must understand the way they view reality. As we understand their worldview, we will be able to share the message of God appropriately in a way that addresses the way they look at reality and live their lives. As always, we will need the grace and wisdom of our Lord Jesus in order to be effective ministers of His Gospel.

Do you remember when George and Harriett moved into the jungle to live with the Bisorio people? The language and culture of the Bisorio people was completely foreign to George and Harriett. The Bisorios had many stories about their view of reality that George and Harriett had to learn. As George and Harriett lived among the people, worked alongside them, listened to them, asked questions of them and observed the way in which they lived, they began to learn the stories that made up their worldview beliefs.

For example, the Bisorios had stories about the many spirit beings and forces that they believed controlled reality. Do you remember the force in nature the Bisorios believed in called Yu? The Bisorios believed Yu controlled their health and that things had to be done a certain way to stay in harmony with Yu. One of the ways George learned this story was by observing Caba going into the jungle to cut down the sago palm branches, believing that by doing so he would bring health to his son. Later, he spoke with Caba about why he went back into the jungle and learned about Caba's belief in Yu.

The Bisorios also had a story about the Sun being the creator of all things. George and Harriett learned about this belief by listening to the older men tell stories about how the Sun created the mountains, the rivers, the animals, man and even evil spirits. As they listened to the Bisorios tell these stories, George and Harriett would ask them to share more details about how they believed the world was created. They would ask questions in the midst of their talking to better understand how they viewed reality.

There were many, many stories and beliefs like this that George and Harriett learned over time. But they did not learn them by watching from a distance. They learned the Bisorios' all-encompassing story of reality by living among them and being part of their everyday lives.

When the time came for George and Harriett to teach the Bisorios God's message, they were able to communicate clearly in the language and culture of the Bisorio people. They had a clear understanding of their worldview story as well. They knew what the Bisorios believed about reality and so when they told them God's message they could wisely address specific areas of their reality that were in conflict with God's Word. All of the time, effort, and patience it took to learn the language, culture and worldview of the Bisorio people led to a very clear presentation of the Gospel message—all praise to God alone!

## Ministering for Worldview Change

We have spent time learning about how to minister for worldview change. Remember, we must prepare well for presenting the Gospel of Christ. Besides learning well the language and culture of the people, we must also understand well the worldview beliefs of the people so that when we present the Gospel, we will be presenting it at a worldview level they can understand. It is also very important to realize that worldview change does not happen in a day and that it will take much time and patience on our part.

We have learned that as we share the Gospel, we must lay the foundation for a new worldview. This means we must teach God's Story in a way to form new worldview beliefs as well as to displace old, false ones. We must establish a new authoritative source for worldview beliefs—God and His Word. As we tell God's Story, we must be sure to communicate that the people are participants in that story and that it relates to them in the here and now. Ministering at a worldview level will be different and challenging but it is no doubt a more effective way to minister and to set in place solid foundations for the growth, development and multiplication of the newly planted church.

It is important to remember that there will be significant ramifications when a new believer forms a new, biblical worldview that stands in opposition to his old false worldview. Remember, ramifications refer to the various outcomes of ministering at a worldview level. A new believer's worldview will not totally change in a day. New believers who have heard God's Story and have trusted Christ for salvation will need to continue to work through old worldview beliefs and practices in light of their new authoritative source for all of life—God's Word.

There will be challenges that they will face in their everyday lives. Many areas of life will come into tension and conflict with the truth of God's Word. There will be a great emotional inner battle for new believers to continue practicing social, cultural and religious customs within their communities that are not in accordance with their new biblical worldview. There will often be a great deal of pressure on new believers from their non-believing family and community members to forsake Christ or face being ostracized from the community. A ramification of genuine worldview change can be losing valued relationships among one's family and community.

Do you remember what happened to Yesuel? When he accepted Christ as his Savior and his worldview began to change, he saw that the practices of his family and community were not in accord with what God taught in Scripture. Because Yesuel humbly and faithfully followed his belief in Christ and no longer participated in his society's customs and traditions, his family and community ostracized him and no longer welcomed him in their homes. Even his own parents had rejected him and he had to move to a different town to find a living to support himself and his family.

We have also learned that there will be ramifications of worldview change in the way life is lived on a daily basis. A new believer will begin to evaluate his daily living practices—including how food is gathered, how sickness is dealt with, how marriage is carried out—in light of what God says in His Word. At times it will be a struggle for the new believer to forsake his old practices and live according to his new biblical worldview. If we are to help our brothers and sisters in

Christ to continue to develop a true biblical worldview, we must be prepared to patiently and lovingly help them with practical, daily struggles.

Recall how George and Harriett saw many new Bisorio believers wrestle with the pressure from the unbelievers to participate in an ungodly tradition festival dance called the yabo. The yabo festival tradition among the Bisorios was a very important time of community celebration and involved pig sacrifices to dead ancestors, as well as singing idolatrous songs of praise to various created things like the moon, animals and birds. Everyone among all the neighboring villages was expected to take part in this festive time. People prepared for months ahead of time for the yabo. It was a central celebration for them as a people. To take part in the yabo was to affirm your identity as a Bisorio and your allegiance to your clan, the community and the ancestors.

Because of the centrality of the yabo and all that it had meant to them before they came to Christ, many Bisorio Christians struggled with great relational and emotional pressures when it came time to the celebrate the yabo. This was no small issue. To not partake in the yabo meant, among other things, denial of what their families wanted and expected. It took much teaching, praying and patient guiding of the Bisorios through this issue before they came to the place of further worldview change and were able to fully yield to God regarding this matter, regardless of the consequences. Yes, brothers and sisters, ministering at a worldview level will involve much time, prayer and loving patience!

We have learned that we must encourage and empathize with new believers in their new life in Christ and all that that entails. Jesus cares deeply for them as individuals, even when they feel isolated from their families and communities. We must encourage them to continue to develop moral character that is consistent with a biblical worldview. We must be gentle and wise in teaching them how to walk through the trials they will face, always using the Scriptures as our guide.

Do you remember the struggle Hadebo faced after he became a Christian? One day Hadebo shared with a missionary friend how he struggled in the midst of a failed hunting trip. Before going hunting he had humbly prayed to God, turning his back on his former beliefs and practices. He was trusting God alone for help in hunting. He hunted all day and yet got nothing. His hunger pangs were real and intense. He came back to the village empty handed. In light of catching nothing, Hadebo freely shared the great struggle and temptation he felt to call out to former spirits for help. If we are to help our brothers and sisters in Christ to continue to develop a true biblical worldview, we must be prepared to patiently and lovingly help them with practical, daily struggles like these.

We have also learned the importance of encouraging the believer to grow in the fellowship of other believers—the church. As the new believers continue to grow, we must help them learn how to effectively share their faith in their own cultural context by word, deed and attitude. It is also vital that as we teach new believers how to be a community of Christ's followers, we teach them to live for God within their existing community.

The Bisorio church is a great example of how worldview change strongly influenced the growth of its own believers as well as their effectiveness as ministers in their own cultural context. The

Bisorio church has learned by God's grace and through learning well the Scriptures, that they are to be an instrument for worldview change within their own community and to surrounding cultures. The ramifications of worldview change can be wonderfully powerful if, by God's grace, we will submit to Him and His Word and are willing to invest the time, exercise the patience and do the hard work of ministering at a worldview level.

### Skills for Ministry

In addition to the implications and ramifications of worldview ministry, we have also learned specific ways in which we can discover the worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister. We must remember that we cannot discover the worldview beliefs of the people without learning well their language and culture as well as building trusting, loving relationships with them.

We have learned that stories are one of the most important ways we can learn the worldview beliefs of the people. Most people have a creation story that tells their beliefs about the origin of the world, man, spirit beings, death and many such basic beliefs about reality. By listening to and learning from the creation stories people have, we will discover many beliefs that shape the worldview eyeglasses through which they see reality.

For example, recall the story that the Bisorio people told regarding creation. The Bisorios believed that the sun was the creator of all things. They saw the sun as a type of being that could think, create, and choose to do things. They did not know what the origin of the sun was. They believed that it simply existed. They also believed that the ground and the sky have always been. The Bisorios said that when the sun began creating things it simply thought things into existence. For example, the sun looked down on the ground and thought, "Crocodiles should exist." And in the way the sun thought, even so, crocodiles came into existence. The sun thought, "Pigs should exist." And in the way the sun thought, even so, pigs came into existence. The sun went on thinking like that and creating things until it finished making everything, including man. After the sun created man, the sun thought, "Who should eat man so that he should die?" So the sun created the spirit beings called yama. The Bisorios believed that the sun created yama to "eat" man so that man would die. This was the story the Bisorios told and believed of how they were created and started as a people as well as how the world around them was created. After creating everything, the sun did not have involvement in the everyday affairs of them as people. They understood the sun to be uninterested and far removed from the affairs of men.

Think of how important it would be to first know this creation story of the Bisorio people before trying to tell them the truth from God's Word, the Bible. Learning this story ahead of time would give you much guidance. Consider, for example, how different God, the true Creator of the Bisorios, is from what the Bisorios were believing about their creator. Far from being uninterested and far removed from the affairs of men, God is intimately involved with His creation, particularly with mankind! There was much for them to learn! One of the things, among many, that George and Harriett did to create interest among the Bisorios to listen to God's Word was to tell them that they knew the origin of the sun. This stirred curiosity among the Bisorios to listen to God's Word.

We have learned that we can also discover worldview beliefs through crises such as illness and death. It is vital that we share in the trials of the people, loving and supporting them as they experience difficulties. As we do this and strengthen our relationships with them, we will be able to discover many of their beliefs about reality. This will guide us in how to wisely share God's Story in a way they understand and in a way that addresses their existing worldview beliefs.

The burial practices of the Kipsigis people of Kenya, Africa provide a good example of how we can learn the worldview beliefs of a people through the crisis of death. The Kipsigis people believe spirits of the dead eventually come back to live in bodies of future generations. So when a father dies, he is laid to rest and before the grave is covered with dirt, the oldest son throws grass into the open grave. This is a final blessing on his father. The son says, "Go safely, Father, we will soon call you to come back to us." Those who are watching and listening to this burial ritual learn an aspect of worldview belief—what the Kipsigis believe about reality. They learn to believe that their ancestors keep living and never really die and that living relatives can call back dead ancestors to live in the bodies of another generation. Their hope is tied to being reborn again and continuing to live on earth. We can see from this example that we can learn what the Kipsigis' worldview belief is regarding death and life thereafter by observing their burial practices.

We have learned several other ways to discover the worldview beliefs of the people to whom we minister. Religion and rites of transition are two more significant ways we can discover their core worldview beliefs. Remember, religion is developed from an authoritative story that the people genuinely believe. It is a combination of beliefs, values, emotions, practices and allegiances that shape and affirm both a person's identity and a sense of belonging among a community. Religion also permeates all of a people's society and culture. As we see a people's religion being lived out in everyday life and as we observe the rituals, symbols and forms that represent their religion, we will see that their religion which is intimately tied to their worldview, strongly influences how they judge what is right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, holy or profane.

Do you remember the story about the Ga people and their religious practice of the homowo celebration? The Ga people believe in gods that can give them good harvests in the year to come. Outward expression of this worldview belief takes place when they celebrate the homowo religious festival together. Remember, the Ga people deeply value celebrating homowo in the correct way, believing that they are able to entreat the gods to give them good harvests in the next year. All the people have to arrive into the homes of their fathers by a certain time, the gods and ancestors must be fed before anyone eats, and even as the people eat, the priests have to eat first to ask for the blessing of the gods for the new year's harvest. All these outward forms play a part in revealing what they believe about the nature of reality—what spirits exist and what the nature of the relationship is between the spirit world and them as people.

Recall too how through the practice of the homowo religious festival we learned that the Ga people strongly valued new beginnings. During the homowo festival, they not only begin a new year of harvest, but they also begin a new year of relationships with one another by forgiving grievances of the past year. How they interacted with one another as a community and even how

they restored broken relationships is deeply important to them. As the Ga people celebrate together with great joy and participate in the rituals of homowo, their bonds of relationship are strengthened. Again, these observable outward behaviors and forms of celebration—from the color of clothing they wear to the kinds of sacrifices that are offered to their manner of eating and drinking together and restoring relationships—all help reveal their underlying worldview beliefs about the nature of reality: how man and the spirit world relate, how man relates among themselves and how a good harvest is secured. Ministering among the Ga people would require that these and other important worldview beliefs are learned well before sharing the important message of Christ. Their religious practices are windows through which we can look into their worldview.

We have also learned that there is much we can learn about a people's worldview by learning how they carry out their rites of transition. Remember, most societies divide the progression of life into stages and mark these transitions by rituals. These transitions are called rites of transition and they transform a person from one level of identity to another, giving them a growing sense of worth and importance in his society. Some examples of rites of transitions in many societies around the world include the life transition into birth, initiation into adulthood, marriage, and funerals. As we observe their rites of transition, how they carry them out and what they believe about the various life stages, we will gain valuable insight into a people's values, their hopes and what they believe to be the ultimate nature of reality.

Recall the people group called the Samo who believe that life is given when an ancestral spirit enters the newborn's body at birth. They believe this is what gives the newborn its life. However, the newborn is not fully human until it has teeth and can walk and talk. This takes about three years. During this time period the family seeks to determine which ancestral spirit has given life to the child. Once that is determined the child receives that ancestor's name and becomes a member of the family. This rite of transition from birth to becoming truly human takes three years and is based on man's assessment!

How different from the biblical understanding of what it means to be human. We are all—male and female—created in the “image of God.” And as David, king of Israel, wrote under God's inspiration, “You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because you are to be feared; all you do is strange and wonderful. I know it with all my heart. When my bones were being formed, carefully put together in my mother's womb, when I was growing there in secret, you knew that I was there—you saw me before I was born” Psalm 139:13-16. We can learn much about the worldview beliefs of a people by learning more about the rites of transition, including those that surround birth and becoming human.

Or do you remember the transition rite of the Waxe people, initiating a boy into manhood? A young boy's back is cut in the pattern of a crocodile's back by a shaman and then stuffed with a mixture of ash and ground. The blood that flows from the cuts is said to be the blood of his mother, being drained from his body. When the initiation is complete, the boy is now considered a man. His mother's blood will weaken him no more. For the rest of his life he will carry the marks of the crocodile on his back, but he will consider the pain worthwhile. The strong spirit of the crocodile will be with him to protect him wherever he goes.

From this rite of transition into adulthood, we learn much about the Waxe's worldview. For example, we see that their view of the nature of reality includes a belief that a male's association with his mother and her blood makes him weak both physically and spiritually. He must be released from that association. They believe that the shaman has the spiritual power to secure that release. Also, they believe that the spirit world—in this case, the spirit of the crocodile—will be that which protects and watches over the initiate, now a man.

We have also learned the importance of listening to and learning the proverbs and riddles that are common among the people whom we serve. We must learn what their proverbs mean and in what contexts they are used. It is also important to learn who should address whom and the values and beliefs that are being conveyed.

Some proverbs will reveal specific things about a culture or a worldview that is common among the people. For example, the Kipsigis people have a proverb that literally means, "My ancestral spirits are not tied to yours." What they mean by this saying is that my ancestral spirits cannot harm you and your ancestral spirits cannot harm me. So we can learn from this that the Kipsigis believe that every person is in control of his own ancestral spirits. This is a significant worldview belief that we can learn just from understanding well this proverb.

We have learned that we can discover worldview beliefs through the everyday life affairs of the people. As we live alongside the people in their everyday lives, we can learn what their everyday life affairs are, how they are discussed and the contexts in which they are discussed. This will give us valuable insight into the worldview beliefs of the people.

Recall the example of George and Ifanime walking through the jungle. George, the missionary among the Bisorios, was traveling on the jungle trail one day with his Bisorio friend, Ifanime. Suddenly, Ifanime stopped and began to talk to two parrots roosting in a tree up above them. Ifanime told George that the parrots were reincarnated ancestors who were inquiring as to who George was and what he was doing there. Ifanime assured the parrots that George was friendly. He told them that George was with him and therefore George was acceptable to the ancestors. Ifanime did this to avoid angering the ancestors.

We can see through this everyday affair of walking through the jungle that we can learn about the worldview beliefs of the people. In this walk with Ifanime, George learned that the Bisorios believed that their ancestors were reincarnated and that it was important to keep friendly company. It was vital that they not anger the ancestors and therefore bring bad fortune to themselves. Through the everyday affairs of life, we can learn significant things about the worldview beliefs of the people.

These specific ways of discovering the worldview beliefs of the people are all very important. But remember, we must live among them in order to learn well these things and therefore to learn well their worldview beliefs. By doing this, we will be better and more effective ministers of the Gospel of our Lord.

### Syncretism and Worldviews

We have also learned that syncretism is one of the greatest hindrances to effective evangelism, church growth and multiplication. It seriously affects the overall advance of God's Kingdom around the world. Remember, syncretism takes place when people hear God's Word and mix biblical beliefs and practices together with non-biblical, traditional beliefs and practices. This mixing of God's Word together with traditional beliefs and practices tragically results in the continuing of a wrong worldview that distorts God's truth and the Gospel of Christ. It seriously hinders effective ministry.

Do you remember what the primary cause of syncretism is? It is a failure to minister at a worldview level. The former, false worldview of a new believer is not truly replaced with biblical truth and therefore the former worldview eyeglasses through which he has viewed reality remains largely the same. His old understanding and interpretation of reality does not fully change and he is therefore unable to experience a deep and biblical change in the way he views and lives his life.

Recall the Christian leader who had not abandoned his old worldview beliefs. One time, this Christian leader in the church told a friend that he had seen his grandfather outside his house. The friend was troubled upon hearing that because he knew the Christian leader's grandfather had been dead for three years! What the Christian leader had seen outside his house was a fox. Because he had not yet parted with his old worldview beliefs, he interpreted the fox outside his house as being his reincarnated grandfather. Though he was a leader in the local church he did not have a clear understanding of reality and continued to hold to this erroneous belief as well as any other such false beliefs. How can leaders effectively lead others if they themselves have syncretistic beliefs? Syncretism is a serious issue indeed!

We have learned how syncretism affects the church. A syncretistic church will be weak, unhealthy and anemic with its loyalties divided and its progress consumed by old fears and concerns. It will be unable to help others or spread the Good News of Christ because it has never truly understood the ramifications of the Gospel. However, the church that avoids syncretism will be strong and effective for Christ. The new believers whose worldview beliefs change to biblical beliefs, will be strong leaders and part of a healthy and reproducing church.

Do you remember what Hameyagu did when he came to Christ? Previously, the Bisorios feared going into the jungle by themselves at night for fear of being killed by the yama evil spirit. However, one night after becoming a Christian, Hameyagu headed into the jungle to collect firewood all by himself! His worldview had changed so much that he no longer feared the yama. When someone asked him why he wasn't afraid to go by himself, he confidently replied, "I am in my Father's hand. What can happen to me?" Hameyagu had a genuine worldview change that took place in his heart. His new worldview and confidence in God and His Word was evidenced by his new outward behavior. He rested his life in the truth of God's Word and was set free from fear! He was living unto God as God desired. Hameyagu was never harmed in any way and lives for God to this very day! He did not mix his former beliefs with God's Word, but rather lived according to God's Word alone. Hameyagu was one of many Bisorio believers who trusted Christ alone, abandoned his false worldview beliefs and enabled the Bisorio church to be a strong influence on their society.



## Conclusion

The task of ministering at a worldview level is a significant one. We have learned how deeply and emotionally all people hold to their worldview even though they may not realize it or say so. Because that is true, our ministry among them is going to be hard work. This hard work is going to call for an investment of much time and patience, living where they live and being a member of their community so we can proclaim the message of Jesus Christ intelligently. In Colossians 4:3-4, Paul asked the church to pray that he could make the message of Christ clear in the way he ought. Paul also talked about how he could communicate most intelligently to those whom he was ministering. In 1 Corinthians 9:20, he said, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law." He goes on to say in verse 22, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some." Paul understood the importance and the hard work it took to assimilate into a new culture in order to communicate clearly and effectively at a level that would be life-changing.

The goal of this course has been to learn how to make the message of Christ clear in order to build a strong community of Christ's followers. By God's grace, you have learned to value the need to minister to others at the worldview level and to invest much time and patience into your ministry efforts. There is no substitute for building relationships and learning well the culture, language and worldview of the people to whom we minister. And above all, you must daily seek the wisdom, help and encouragement of God our Father to be effective ministers of His Gospel among a people who desperately need His salvation.

## Understanding Worldview and Religion

### Part 2: Worldview Discipleship

#### Lesson Eighteen: The Importance of Discipling a Biblical Worldview

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the **Spirit of wisdom and revelation**, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the **eyes of your heart may be enlightened** in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. Eph. 1:17-19*

A number of years ago I saw a news report that sent me to my knees in prayer. The news media was reporting *another* famine in Ethiopia. I was saddened when they emphasized that this was happening in the “Christian part of the country.” I wondered how this could be. I had been taught that God blessed His people, so if this was true, then Christians all over the world should be blessed. If they were truly Christians and if God was truly God, then this should not be happening. I ached for my Christian brothers and sisters suffering in Ethiopia but had no idea what was causing the problem. Little did I know that in response to my prayers that day, God was going to take me on a long journey to discover the answer to my question.

Eventually, I found myself working as a missionary in Liberia, West Africa, during some of the worst years of that nation’s civil war. Again, I was faced with similar questions. How could a country where about 40 percent of the population claims to be Christian be experiencing such pain and physical poverty? I witnessed the destruction of the capitol city three times over a 7-year period and heard countless tales of suffering. Together with most of our friends we lost everything we owned, twice. At the same time, we experienced God’s provision of physical safety and I could see God’s faithfulness as we all learned to have a deep, abiding trust first-hand in God as protector. But still, the question was there; why did the Liberian Christians continue to suffer?

It would be easy to say that it is all too difficult for us to deal with troubling questions and so we should accept these problems with humility and learn how to live with them. Perhaps some nations are just not meant to be blessed like other nations. A pastor in Bulgaria once told me that God had forsaken their country and given it to Satan; there was nothing they could or should try to do about it. Something inside me rises up in indignant protest when I hear these kinds of words, especially coming from a Christian’s mouth. If we as the church *choose* to do nothing, then that Bulgarian pastor was completely right; all we can do is meekly accept what comes our way and let Satan rule.

Over the years as I meditated and studied on why some nations suffered more than others, I had to accept that the situation is not simple. There are political systems and structural injustices which seem to bring more problems than solutions, no matter how good-intentioned they might be. Droughts, earthquakes and floods seem to indiscriminately bring pain and hardship. Wars and tyrannical dictators cause untold suffering, death and destruction. But even as I was realizing the complicated, bigness of the problems, I began to grow in my understanding of how big God truly is and that He has given us, as the church, the responsibility to be agents of change in our nations.

I was then faced with a new question: How does the church become an “agent of change”? I believe the major key God has given us as a church is discipleship. A disciple is a follower of Jesus under instruction in how to live out a Christian life. It is not about receiving or giving instruction alone, however. To be true “discipleship” the disciple must put the instruction into practice and learn to apply it in *all* areas of life. If we only learn how to act properly, or look good, but do not have our deep, inner thinking changed so dramatically that it affects every area of our lives as did the disciples of Jesus in the New Testament, then it is only a partial discipleship and the church is unable to have the impact God intends.

Outward behavior we easily see and we are good at instructing people in how they should behave as believers, i.e., do not steal, do not lie, and do not commit adultery. Given enough time, we are also able to instruct one another in the area of theology so people begin to understand what Christianity is all about, i.e., Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. However, there is a deeper level in us which dictates how we see and understand the world around us. It is much more difficult to see this part of us changed because we are often not even aware it exists. We will call this area of our being our “worldview.”

You can think of worldview as something like a pair of glasses. The glasses determine how you see, not what there is to be seen. For example, if I look through a pair of red glasses, everything will look red or pink. In God’s reality, those things may be white, blue or yellow, but I will be convinced they are pink because my glasses cause them to look pink to me. My worldview is defined by my red glasses and says: “The world is pink.”

Another way to understand this is to think of a room in your house; most likely you identify the room and think of it by the furniture you see in the room. “This must be the bedroom because there is a bed in it.” The furniture is the first thing we see and often the floor is taken for granted. In this picture, the bed would symbolize our theological beliefs, other philosophical thoughts and our rules for living, while the floor is our worldview. The bed is supported by the floor even though we may not notice it.

Let’s picture an apple. Imagine the color of the skin, the shine of its texture. You can smell it, and the taste is just a simple bite away. If we compare an apple to us, our behavior would be the skin of the apple; everyone sees it. Our understanding and knowledge are the flesh of the apple. They are easily exhibited; we can smell and taste them easily. At the center, hidden deep down inside is our worldview; the seeds in the core of the apple, supplying the life and power of re-creation to the apple.

Just as the red glasses color our world, the floor holds us up and the apple seeds provide ongoing life for apples trees, our worldview provides the filter, the foundation and the very “whys” behind our every action and belief. There is nothing we do or think that is not affected by our particular worldview. Yet, worldviews are hidden so well and taken for granted that often we are unaware of our own worldview and would be unable to easily define it. It is on this deeper level of belief that we as the church must be disciplined if we are going to see our communities and our nations changed and impacted by the Gospel.

We usually take our worldviews for granted and are as unaware of their existence as the air we breathe. Until they are challenged, we are oblivious to their influence on our lives. It is necessary to understand why we believe the way we do. Otherwise, when pressure comes, we will often unconsciously default to these basic belief systems although they may be contrary to the behavior and thought patterns we have been taught in church. Thus, people who on Sunday

are sitting in church, taking part in the communion service, may on Monday be lying, taking bribes or committing adultery. On a deeper level of their belief and value system they have not allowed themselves to be convinced and changed. Instead, they are following a belief system which is contrary to God. Perhaps this is partly what Paul referred to when he wrote:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (Rom. 7:15-20)

To see lasting change in our nations and communities then we must think like Jesus, act like Jesus and believe like Jesus. We must grow into the same Biblical values and beliefs that Jesus has. Romans 12:2 tells us:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Until our minds are renewed and we practice God's will in all areas of life, we will be unable to effect true, lasting positive change in our nations.

II Corinthians 10:5 tells us we are to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” This means that those things that are contrary to what God thinks are to be destroyed in our hearts and minds. Notice that it is we who are to demolish these arguments, thoughts and beliefs. It is by submitting our thoughts to God and being disciplined in our thinking that we can see changes in our worldview.

Worldview is not the same as culture. Cultures are the outward expressions of our worldviews. Cultures contain the rules we live by and our proper actions based on the values of our worldview. People may hold the same worldview values, but express them in different cultural actions. Some cultures will have long speeches to greet one another; others will say a quick greeting, but perhaps sit for hours, visiting about different things. The value beneath both of these cultures might be the same: people and relationships are more important than anything else. They express themselves quite differently, but some parts of their worldviews are closely related.

Though God has not required us to live by any one specific culture and He has allowed us freedom to be creative in the outward cultural expressions of our values, He wants us to develop Biblical values. These values are what Jesus spent his time trying to instill in his disciples. It did not happen overnight, even for the disciples who were taught daily by Jesus for 3 years. This process may take a lifetime, depending upon our openness to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:23-25), because we are easily blinded to our own basic worldview. I grew up in church so always believed I thought Biblically. I will never forget my surprise when I came to realize there were parts of the Bible I did not fully believe; much of the Old Testament had been pushed to a place of irrelevance because it was just for “way back then.” I did not recognize or understand the

implications of the secular training I had been surrounded by in my culture that had blinded me, not allowing me to fully embrace Biblical values.

If we want to see our communities, and even nations, developed toward what God truly intends, then it is vital that we be “discipled” in our thinking and be able to identify the lies that Satan would have us live under through secular or animistic influences in our cultures. We cannot escape from the fact that what we truly believe has consequences for us. If we believe that the baby in the womb is only “tissue” and not a living being, then it follows that we can easily abort the tissue and go on with our lives, pretending nothing has happened. If we believe the witch doctor or some other local spiritual expert can help us get a job, then we will pay whatever fees are required to the witch doctor and do whatever the witch doctor requires in order to get the job, often causing even further economic hardship. Our beliefs determine what we do and how we act in every situation so if we want to live the way that God desires, then we must think the way God thinks.

Recently, I again heard a news report from Ethiopia about the famine going on there right now. This time the Christians were supporting one another and the people in their communities. Those whose animals died were being given animals by others. Where it should not be raining, it was raining because the Christians were praying. Areas where there were no Christians, it was dry as a bone. People who had been dying of starvation were prayed for and healed and then their neighbors continued to share their food. Miracle after miracle is happening there today. What is the difference this time? I believe it is because the people are acting on their faith, not submitting to their circumstances and old beliefs and God is blessing them.

As I have traveled on this journey begun so many years ago to discover why it seemed some were blessed and others were not, I have learned to pray for myself and those I have worked with, Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:17-19. “I pray that the glorious Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Christ better. Then you will have deeper insight. You will know the confidence that he calls you to have and the glorious wealth that God’s people will inherit.”

We all need the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation” so we may know God better and to have the “eyes of our hearts enlightened” so we may know the hope to which He has called us. I have been challenged over and over again as I have discovered different ways my thinking has needed to change. It is an exciting journey to grow closer to God and to begin to think more and more like He intends, in other words, to grow more towards having a Biblical worldview.

## **An Overview of the different Worldviews**

*We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (II Cor. 10:5)*

While there are thousands of different cultures in the world today, there are only three basic worldviews forming their foundations: secular, animistic and Biblical. The secular worldview believes that man is supreme and that true reality is in the physical realm. The animistic worldview believes that spirits rule over man and that true reality takes place in the spirit realm, with the physical world subjugated to the spirits. The Biblical worldview believes that God is supreme and that He created and rules over both the spiritual and physical worlds.

In the days of Jesus, the animistic worldview would have been prevalent everywhere, except amongst the Jews living by Biblical traditions and rules. Still, the animistic worldview is prevalent in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, South America and everywhere else indigenous tribal beliefs are still held. Even Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, although considered “high religions” because they are highly structured, still have animism at the core of their belief systems. New Age beliefs are also animistic.

The secular worldview which began during the days of the “Enlightenment” in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century has spread around much of the world, as well, and is dominant in most Communist countries. Everyone who has had a “modern” education, has been taught a secular worldview, whether in a conservative school in rural America, or in Siberia with a communistic education or in an African university. However, in these days, various forms of animism are making fresh inroads and gaining popularity amongst young people who are disillusioned with modernity and the secular worldview in Europe, America, and even in communist countries today.

In many parts of the world these worldviews all meet. A secular education often sits uncomfortably atop an animistic worldview. Christians then often add in the parts of a Biblical worldview they have grown into. It is very difficult to “unpack” our way of thinking because thinking is just something we do—like breathing. As part of worldview discipleship, we need to understand *why* we are thinking what we are thinking and *why* we are responding the way we are responding. As Peter says in I Peter 1:13: let us “prepare our minds for action.” Are our values and beliefs Biblical? If not, then we will be at the whim of the worldly worldviews around us and sin will run rampant in our nations. But if they are Biblical, then we will be able to discern the mind of the Lord and lead the church into its rightful place of influence in its community.

### The Secular Worldview

The secular worldview holds the core belief that true reality is exclusively physical. Only what we can see, hear, touch or somehow “know” with our physical senses is real. Natural powers (like gravity) that can be analyzed are real. Those things which “objective” scientific methods can identify are real. Thus, a natural power like gravity is real, but the spirit world and God do not exist. Gravity can be verified with natural scientific methods, whereas the spirit world and God cannot.

In this worldview, effectively science has become god, deciding what is true and what is not. Using science to define reality also allows the secular worldview to believe that science defines destiny. This is expressed through “faith” in technology and the conviction that what *can* be done scientifically *must* be done. I often catch myself thinking, “Science will soon have the answer to that problem,” whether I am thinking about some human disease or some environmental problem. While science can be useful, a blind faith in technology has also led to the nuclear bomb and other technological terrors. Today the discussion is about human cloning—humankind trying to play god. But if one does not believe in God, why not “develop” toward the highest heights a human can obtain?

With scientific reasoning as its basis, the secular worldview’s question to a problem is “*how*” and “*what*”. What has occurred? How has it occurred and what can we do to make it happen again, or stop it from ever happening again? To answer these questions, *methods* are developed. Using mathematical hypotheses, methods are derived from trial and error: If I do

“A” and “B” then “C” will always occur. Without this way of thinking, it would have been impossible to put man on the moon. However, over the last century, the secular worldview infiltrated society and teaching styles so thoroughly, that “methods” are seen as the answer to most of life. Thousands of books have been produced about “how to do” just about anything to do with life including: how to fall in love, how to have a good marriage, how to raise your children, how to make friends, etc. If one follows the steps or methods in these different books, one will have a wonderful life. At least that is the claim of the books. Gradually, pragmatism has become the number one value in this worldview. The question is not, “is this the right thing to do” but rather, “will it work?” If it works, then it must be right to do.

### **The Animistic Worldview**

To best explain the animistic worldview, I will speak in extremes that will help identify the values behind the behaviors acted out in life around you. However, unless we were to come across a tribal group hidden somewhere in the forest who have never encountered secular society, we would not find people with pure animistic thinking anymore.

Animists believe there is a spiritual reason behind everything that happens. In other words, there are spirits controlling everything. In effect, human beings have little free will because of the spiritual forces. The best we as humans can do is discover what particular spirits are behind something and then try to influence them to do what we want. To influence the spirits, fetishes, charms or amulets may be worn on the person or hung over the door. Usually at the direction of the witch doctor, or some other local expert, fetishes can be made from just about anything: pieces of a certain plant, bones, teeth, hair or other body parts of an animal or a human. Even the Bible can be used as a fetish—left open on a certain page near the bed to be sure no demon can attack during the night.

Fatalism is the end result of believing that spirits are in total control. There is no point in trying to change things or improve things because the spirits will decide what happens anyway. Using safety precautions like seat belts in cars or making sure that vehicles are loaded safely is useless because the spirits will decide the outcome.

I was once traveling from Guinea to Senegal, West Africa, in a taxi that the designers created to hold 7 people. At one point on the journey, there were 17 people, plus all their luggage and market goods, in or on top of that old Peugeot. With a load more than double the amount the car was built for, I was not surprised when the axle broke. The owner of the car, however, acted shocked even though it was apparent the axle had been welded back together probably after some similar episode in the past. After all, there is no reason to learn from past experiences when bad spirits caused it, anyway. Often we hear of bad accidents involving overloaded trucks or boats where dozens or maybe even hundreds are killed. If you ask for the reason: “it was the will of the spirits.” In India, a problem might be attributed to “karma,” in the Middle East, “Allah” or in other parts of the world any of a thousand different names for the spirits. I used to smile at guests who would visit West Africa and remark about how “Christian” the city would look because of all the cars with some slogan about Jesus or God on them. Little did they know, these were posted on most cars as a fetish to keep the spirits satisfied and, thus, the cars safe from accidents.

The spirits can be present in any form of creation, but snakes, by far, get the No. 1 suspicion for harboring spirits probably over most of the world. In Liberia they were also

thought to be in cats, dogs, owls and egrets. The black-colored dogs and cats got the most blame. But the egret (a white bird who likes to sit on the backs of cattle to eat bugs), is thought to be the spirit of the cow. In Mali I was warned about not jogging through a particular forest because demons lived in the branches of the trees. In West Africa it is believed that there are whole cities of people, witches and other powerful wicked beings living under the sea, conspiring to take captives and do other evil things. Rivers, lakes and mountains can also be filled with spirits.

Most African animists believe that the spirits are their own people (grandparents, parents, cousin, neighbor, etc.) who may have not been treated properly in life and have returned in revenge to torment them. Consequently, the living must gain power over the spirits in order to prevent trouble in their daily lives. Anything negative that happens has been caused by someone cursing them and sending a spirit to do evil, or because the spirit felt like doing it because the animist had not done anything good for the spirit. If appeased, the spirits can bring health, wealth and power. Otherwise, they can bring sickness, destruction of crops, loss of jobs, and death. The animist must learn how to manipulate the spirits through gifts, charms and sacrifices if they want to survive. Ignoring the spirits is not an option.

Politics and sports events are filled with witchcraft because of this belief system. During elections children are at risk for kidnapping to serve as human sacrifices—even in the most “western-looking” African countries. Sports teams are “blessed” by shamans or other spiritual leaders and then sent out to represent their nation in a contest that sometimes seems more like a fight between spiritual powers, than a game between neighboring teams.

Lest we think this animistic behavior only happens in Africa or Asia, let me also mention that American baseball players often talk about their “lucky charms.” Without them, then cannot play successfully. A Swiss friend once claimed that Swiss athletes are treated and blessed by “spiritual” healers. According to him, those that refuse this treatment are ostracized by other players or not allowed on teams.

In the West there are many superstitions. For instance:

- We get 7 years bad luck for breaking a mirror
- We must “touch wood” when we say something that we are wishing to happen or not happen, otherwise the opposite of what we want might occur;
- It is bad luck to walk under a ladder or to open an umbrella inside a building;
- Carrying a rabbit’s foot is good luck;
- We should toss a pinch of salt over our shoulder if we should spill salt (to keep something bad from happening).

These so-called superstitions are in reality the remnant of animistic beliefs. Salt or a rabbit’s foot give some kind of “spiritual” control over us. We may have forgotten where it came from, but many people will act out these animistic beliefs. Hollywood has helped to maintain animistic belief systems (stories of witches, vampires, ghosts, etc.). More lately, the American and Canadian national park systems have begun teaching Native American animistic belief systems as values for taking better care of creation. While there is a valid place for understanding these cultures and belief systems, as Christians we cannot accept them as our values.



## The Biblical Worldview

The Bible teaches us that there is one God. He created the physical world, the spirit world and man. God is Spirit, yet he became man in the person of Jesus Christ. He is totally involved in *all* areas of life—both *physical* and *spiritual*. Man in his stubborn rebellion (and probably with more than a little help from Satan) has developed worldviews that have moved from this central truth to extremes that barely hold any memory of truth in them.

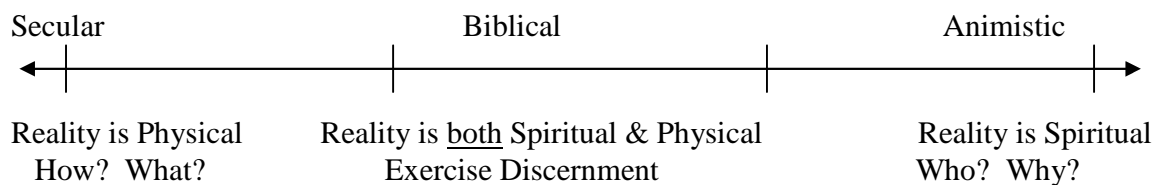
There are spiritual reasons for some things that happen—but spirits do not cause *all* things that happen. If I decide to throw a rock at my friend, it is my decision. As a believer, no spirit can *make* me do it unless I *allow* myself to be possessed and controlled by spiritual forces. If I throw the rock, I am making a decision of my will and then physically doing it. My friend is not being attacked by spirits, but by *me*. If I get in a car accident because I fell asleep at the wheel, it may be because I was too tired to be driving. Our bodies need sleep and I may have neglected myself so I physically could not stay awake. The accident would be a natural cause of my decision to drive when I should have been sleeping. If I harm someone else in that accident, they have not been harmed by spirits, but by *me*.

There are also physical reasons for some things that happen. In our Liberian neighborhood, there were two wells for drinking water. One well was provided by an international relief organization. It was a sealed well with a pump. The water was clean and safe to drink. No one got sick from drinking the water. The other well was dug by hand and had no top. A bucket on a rope was used to draw the water. Occasionally, children would drop things into the well, or a rat or lizard would fall in and drown. People drinking from this well were regularly sick with diarrhea. It is easy for us to see the physical reason why the open well water was not safe to drink. I have yet to meet a person coming from an animist background who would think any relief agency (including the UN) is more powerful than the spirits. And I would agree with them. Yet, the agency well is clean. If it isn't because the agency is more powerful than the spirits, it must be because the real reason for the clean/dirty water is physical.

At the same time, all things do not have physical causes. We live in a world that is physical, but there is a spiritual realm, as well. The Bible tells us, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). We do have a spiritual enemy. And in Phil. 1:6 Paul tells us that God will be faithful to complete the work he has begun in us. God is at work in us—not just on Sundays, but everyday—to perfect our character and provide for us. He has not changed. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). He still heals and works miracles in our lives. He has not left us to live this life alone, but wants to be intimately involved in every aspect of our lives. If we have a problem, we do not need to run to the nearest "self-help" book, but rather should look to him to be our provider and our wisdom. Everything, including our work, shopping, and playing, should be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

The animistic or secular worldview would call us to go to one extreme or the other in seeking solutions to the problems of this life. However, the biblical worldview is somewhere in the middle, between these two extremes. (See diagram.) Some things have physical causes; some things have spiritual causes. As Christians, we need to ask God for the gift of discernment to understand what is happening. If someone is sick because they are drinking water from a dirty well, we are to pray for their healing. At the same time, we need to recognize that they are going to get sick repeatedly unless the physical reason for their sickness is solved. Or if someone gets sick, besides praying for their healing, we should ask the Lord if it is also an attack of Satan.

One day, I started coming down with malaria symptoms. In this case, it was obvious that it was an attack—I was scheduled to speak that afternoon before a large group of pastors. I resisted the malaria in the name of Jesus and it immediately went away. Other times, I suffered through the whole phase of the disease, despite praying, realizing I had it because I had not bothered to take the preventative medicine I should have been taking.



We should not ignore the fact that God sometimes allows problems to occur in our lives to bring correction or to develop our character. James 1:2-4 says, “the trying if your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work that you may be entire, lacking nothing.” In our lives we may be reaping what we have sown. If we are blaming these incidents on Satan, we are missing the point God has for us. On the other hand, if we are thinking this is a “string of bad luck” and seeing it all in the physical realm, we are also missing the point. Again, we need discernment and then we need to pray where appropriate and take physical action where needed.

Ever since Adam and Eve reached out for that bite of fruit, humankind has been after power and control. Both the animistic and secular worldviews seek to control their existence and destiny in their own ways. The animist wants to gain control and power over the spirits in order to live. The secular worldview uses knowledge as power so they might grow as powerful as this God they no longer believe in. Both worldviews need to lay down their manipulating methods before God, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End, who is all and is over all.

Unfortunately, when the pressures of this life rise, we normally fall back to the comfort zone we come out of. If we come out of an animistic background, we will tend to see everything with a spiritual cause behind it. If we come from a secular background, we will normally attribute physical causes to our problems. Since I come from a secular background, if I get a headache, the first thing I will do is look for aspirin. It probably will not cross my mind to pray for healing, let alone ask God why I am having a headache. On the other hand, if people are falling asleep during my sermon in Africa, it will most likely be immediately attributed to a “demon of sleep attacking the people,” rather than my style of speaking or perhaps the fact that they were up all night at a prayer meeting. Instead of relying on our simple, easy answers based on the comfort of our perspective worldviews, we need to exercise the gift of discernment. Remembering to ask the Lord “why” something has happened, instead of letting our old worldview control our thinking, is the first step toward developing a mind like Christ and beginning to think biblically.

## Christians and Secular Thinking

In Europe and America the church has been greatly affected by the secular worldview. In extreme cases, there are Christians in these parts of the world that hardly believe in the spirit world, and have a difficult time believing God can provide for them. They believe “God helps those who help themselves” and would probably expect to find that saying in the Bible (which it is not). They have difficulty believing God heals anymore, that He will speak to them through visions or dreams; they do not believe in demons or ever expect to see an angel. They have let their spiritual life be shoved aside so that they live it only as something private. This causes many Christians to leave God out of their Monday through Saturday life. Functionally, they are atheists at work, in the sports club, at the supermarket, etc. God has nothing to do with their normal, everyday life. It is not appropriate to classify one particular church or denomination as having this problem. This invasion has occurred across the board. Even in the most “spirit-filled” churches, some individual members are quietly living their lives this way.

The secular worldview and its belief in systems, methods and technology to run life have also influenced the church. God’s truths have been reduced down to a list of methods. We can find books and teachings on “how to do” just about anything: how to witness; how to receive the Holy Spirit; how to pray; how to have a quiet time; how to cast out demons; how to receive healing; how to see church growth . . .” You name it, it’s there. The Bible has been quantified and analyzed to the point that it is easy for trust to be placed in methods, rather than in God.

From there, it is a simple step to somehow believing that we can control God because he is somehow dependent upon us to do His will. For example, let’s consider Jesus’ command for us to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20). When combined with Mark 16:15, this scripture is often reduced to the thought, “go and preach the gospel to the whole world and then I will return.” *Gospel* is usually assumed to mean “gospel of salvation”, in other words, “the good news about salvation.” So, if we give everyone the opportunity to hear about salvation so they might make a choice and we plant a local church that can continue preaching about salvation, we have done what is necessary. Methods and proper techniques are produced and the church is convinced that once the world has “heard the gospel,” Jesus has to return.

In the first place, Jesus does not *have* to do anything, no matter what we have done. Secondly, there is no such phrase in the Bible as “the gospel of salvation.” It is the “gospel of the kingdom.” Salvation is the entryway into the kingdom, but it is not the kingdom in its wholeness. We are to preach the gospel of the kingdom as Jesus did—affecting all of life. Thirdly, Jesus said we are to “make disciples.” Remember that it took Jesus three years to make 12 disciples. *Jesus is talking about a lifestyle, not a technique or method to make him return.*

### Animistic influences on Christians

One day I asked one of our new team members in Liberia to lead worship for our local meeting. She decided to teach us a new worship song so she wrote it out on our whiteboard. I walked into the room, saw the board and panicked. “What pen did you use?” I asked as I ran my finger over the words to see if would erase. Since she was new, it was unlikely she would know the difference between a whiteboard marker and a permanent marker. Sure enough, she had used the wrong pen. As her husband and I quickly worked with kerosene to remove the writing before the board was ruined she remarked, “The devil must not want us to learn this song.”

This is a simplistic, but common example, of seeing “spirits” as the cause of everything that happens. In this case, because she is a Christian, she identified the spirit involved, as “Satan.” According to her worldview, he was the cause of the error. I will not deny that Satan can cause us to “pick up the wrong pen.” However, the problem with her perspective was that it allowed her not to have to take any personal responsibility in the issue. If Christians believe that evil spirits are the cause of *everything* they don’t like or is wrong in their lives, they never have to do anything to correct their character or solve their problems, except pray. It is often difficult to accept responsibility for personal sins and there is the danger that we unconsciously give “glory” to Satan or other demons by blaming them for things we should take responsibility for ourselves.

Another area where Christians living in a culture with an animistic worldview need to be careful is the area of “believing for things in the spirit.” Of course, we are to have faith and believe for those things we have not yet seen, but when a person is still trapped in the mindset of believing *everything* is caused in the spirit realm, there is room for error. Once I was teaching in a church in Africa and as part of the seminar, they were to design a practical, physical project they could realistically expect to do to help their community. One group came with a project that was way beyond their scope financially and physically. They told me they were designing the project in the spirit and would “receive it in the spirit now” for the community. I doubt the community appreciated this “sacrifice” on their part and I am sure nothing practical ever came of it. Another time I was talking to a minister who told me he had a new car. When I asked to see it, I was told he had received it in the spirit, but would soon be able to show it to me.

What is wrong with these two pictures? After all, “we live by faith” (II Cor. 5:7) and faith is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). This seems to be clear. However, for someone from an animistic culture, there is already a strong sense of the spirit in everything so it is easy to step too far in this direction. We need to understand that to deny what is present (or what is *not* present) in the physical realm is to live a lie. Seeing and receiving everything through the spirit realm is not how God has created us to live as humans. It robs us of the fullness of life that God intends us to live and it leaves us an easy prey for the enemy to cause unbelief and doubt in our lives when our physical experience does not line up with our spiritual expectations. James tells us to “consider it pure joy. . . whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4) God has not promised us that we will have no problems and will receive everything we want. God created us as both physical and spiritual beings to live on this earth in wholeness, enjoying the physical world around us and having a spiritual relationship with him. We are to believe in faith and work physically toward changing the world around us.

### Discernment

One evening I was sitting on the steps in front of our house in Liberia. There were no moon or city lights to dim the lights of the stars, so it was especially spectacular. One of my Christian Liberian friends came and sat there with me and started asking me about man traveling to the moon. I casually answered his questions, until finally he confessed to me, “I don’t believe man has ever been on the moon. I mean, how could he really get there? It’s impossible. It must just be a story like we see in the movies.” I was shocked. After all, I grew up in the 60’s when

we all saw men going into space. I still remember sitting in my grandmother's living room as we watched man's first steps on the moon. Of course, it happened!

I thought about it for a moment and realized his worldview was limiting him in picturing man walking around on moon, while mine easily adapted to it. Then I thought of an area where my worldview is limited. It is commonly believed by West Africans that there are whole communities of witches and other demonic manifestations living under the sea along the coast. These witches and demons come from the water to do harm to the people living above water. They may kidnap victims and imprison them under the sea as well, forcing them to become slaves or fellow witches. There are published testimonies of people who have become Christians after their escape from this underwater world. I answered my friend, "I believe man has been to the moon. However, I confess I have a really difficult time with believing there are witches living in cities under the sea along the coast here in West Africa. You believe that, don't you?"

He nodded, "Yes, of course."

I took a deep breath and then I confessed, "Well, I don't care how hard I try, my worldview can't get around that one. I just cannot bring myself to fully believe it. I can accept you believing it, however. How about if I believe man went to the moon and you believe people are living under the sea?" He laughed and agreed.

When pressure comes or we are faced with things we do not understand, we will easily retreat in our minds to what is comfortable for us. Someone coming out of an animistic background, will see spiritual causes for strange things, while the person with a secular background will see physical reasons first.

In a village in Africa there once was a man, sick from malaria. A friend of his and the white doctor discussed the causes of the sickness:

Tribesman: This man is sick because someone worked sorcery against him.

White Doctor: This man is sick from malaria because he was bitten by an infected mosquito.

Tribesman: Yes, he was bitten by a mosquito, but who sent the mosquito?

Who is right? The answer is determined by our worldview since it is our worldview that explains life to us. If that worldview has not been disciplined and renewed, we will not have the spiritual discernment to think as Christ (I Cor. 2:14-16). It is so easy, so comfortable, to allow the old way of life with its animistic or secular influences to affect the living of our lives today. But Paul tells us we should "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we [should] take captivity every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). We need to discover what those wrong thoughts are so we can see our minds renewed and begin to think as Christ. Our goal should be to grow toward a biblical worldview and to leave behind those things of our old life, including the old ways of animistic or secular thinking, in order to live a life of freedom in our hearts and minds, no longer captive to sinful thought patterns.

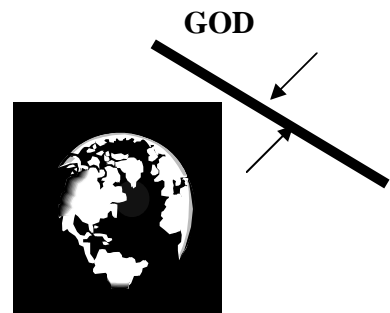
## Lesson Nineteen: Our Worldviews and the Physical World Around Us

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Gen. 1:26)*

We have a choice about *how* we look at the problems in the world around us. Do we have the "mind of Christ" as we look at them? All too often, we judge the problems around us through our old, comfortable worldviews. This leads to incorrect conclusions as to what the problems are and how to solve them. Perhaps the best place to begin is to be sure we have a Biblical understanding of the physical world around us.

### The Secular Worldview & Nature

The secular worldview believes that we live in what is called a "closed system." In other words, even if we believe that God created earth, He has now left it alone, almost as if there is a barrier between earth and God and He created it with a limited number of resources so all we have is here on earth. There is no possibility of intervention by God, hence the system is "closed." In this worldview, sometimes the world is referred to as "spaceship earth." We are hurtling through space all on our own with whatever resources we can discover on this "spaceship." Thus, wealth is limited: when the oil is used up, there is no more; when the diamonds are all found, there are no more. There may not be enough food for the growing population of the world. Everything is limited.



In this worldview, everything here on earth works according to a rigid system and "natural" laws. The natural world is reliable and because of this very reliability, science is possible and changes in the environment can be managed, manipulated and repeated. This reliability provides a platform for people to accept risk. For example, if a certain fertilizer has caused one farmer to realize a huge growth in crops, then it is worth other farmers risking the money involved to buy this fertilizer for their crops, as well.

For many people without God, events are seen as chaotic and meaningless. Christians who hold to this secular worldview also believe that things are finite unless God intervenes. When God does intervene in nature, the intervention is defined as "miraculous," implying that God is not normally involved in the natural operation of creation. If a "miracle" is experienced, then they are likely to attempt to reproduce the exact conditions in which the event occurred in order to reproduce the miracle. Most Christians who are influenced by secularism do not expect God to intervene very often in their lives or in nature. However, this is not a biblical stance to take.

### The Animistic Worldview & Nature

The animist believes that nature is ruled and controlled by the spirit world and is, indeed, a manifestation of the spirits. Consequently, man is under the power of nature: the spirits in the

forest, the spirits living in the river or the lake or on top of a certain mountain. Nature is something to fear because the spirits control it. There is no natural law or order and it is dangerous to take risks because the spirits could get angry. For example, just because other farmers have had increases from the use of fertilizer, there is absolutely no reason to use fertilizer. What if the spirits get angry about it?

This worldview also believes that resources and wealth are limited. If one man increases his wealth, he must have stolen it from his neighbor or the community in some way. Individuals should not get ahead of, or have more than their neighbor. If they do, the community will pull them down by shame, or worse means. An agricultural official retired from his government job and returned to his old village in South Africa. Because he used modern farming techniques, his crops flourished. People thought he was using magic and witchcraft to increase his crops and to get ahead of his neighbors. In anger and fear, they burned him to death. I have known people who have refused to pray for others to get blessed, believing that if their brother gets the blessing, he will be receiving what might have been intended for them, instead. After all, there are only so many resources to go around.

For the Christian coming out of an animistic worldview, it is usually quite easy to believe for “miracles” especially in the area of physical healings and understand them as normal life. Belief in the existence of God assumes He intervenes in nature and rules over the spirit world. This is granted along with His existence.

### The Biblical Worldview & Nature

The Bible gives us a completely different understanding of nature and the world around us. We do not live in a “closed system.” God is a God who intervenes all the time. He did not quit doing things when He finished creating the world. Neither are we to be ruled by nature or the spirits residing in nature.

God created a wonderful, perfect world. All creation was in balance—no environmental problems. “. . . And God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:25). Into this marvelous place, he then brought humans: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” They were created to be spiritual and physical beings in right relationship with one another, with him and with all of creation. God told them to “be fruitful and increase; fill the earth and subdue it.” What’s more, they were to “rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen. 1:28). At this point, God was pleased with all that he had made so he pronounced his creation *very* good.

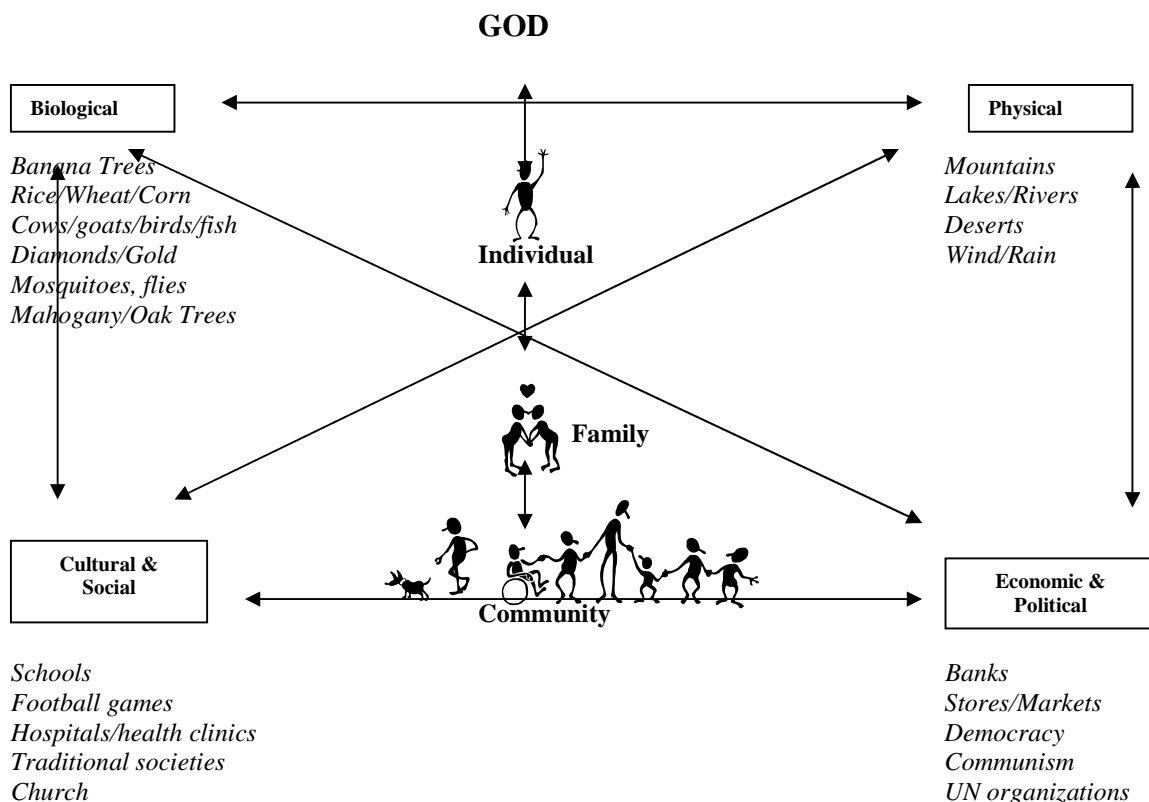
Theologians commonly refer to Genesis 1:28 as the “Dominion Mandate.” “Dominion” means “rule” and “mandate” means “commission.” In other words, God commissioned Adam and Eve to rule over all of creation. Notice, the spirits were not given the rule over creation; man was given this role. Unfortunately, some in history have misinterpreted this to mean that God had given mankind the command to do whatever he wished with creation—including destroying and pillaging the earth, causing God’s creatures to become extinct and ruining the land. If it was deemed good for man, then it was permissible. However, a “good ruler” is one who *takes care* of those he rules over. He protects and makes decisions for the good of those he is ruling over. None of us want to be ruled by a leader who is only out for his or her own good.

God *entrusted* the care of creation to Adam and Eve. It was never God’s intention that mankind would destroy creation, but Adam was put in the garden to “work it and take care of it.”

A garden needs constant care or it soon gets overgrown. It needs pruning and watering; some plants need more sunshine, some like the shade, some need to be divided at the root, some can't be near others. Ask any gardener today, there's always something to do in the garden.

Adam and Eve had an open, free relationship with God. He met with them each evening, walking and talking in the garden. They could tell him about their day and he would share with them from his heart. Imagine the joy and peace in their life that would have been normal for them. It is almost beyond our comprehension. It was God's intention that Adam and Eve and all of us as their descendants should live in perfect harmony with God and with all of creation.

Below is a diagram which depicts our relationships: with God, with one another and with nature. God and human relationships are shown in the middle of the diagram. God created Adam to have relationship with Him, and then family was created (Eve) and eventually a community was the result. God intended all of us to have right relationships with one another and with Him. In this diagram we have divided up the rest of the world into four categories: Physical, Biological, Economic & Political, and Cultural & Social. The physical and biological things have been created by God, although as we have seen above, He gave us the responsibility to rule over them. The Economic & Political and Cultural & Social systems are things which we as mankind have created. The arrows indicate the interconnectedness of the different areas: no area can stand alone. Whatever happens to one, affects the others.



I have listed a few things under each category as examples. These are not meant to be complete lists, but, rather, a place to start us thinking. As people we are tempted to see these different items



separately and not understand how they inter-relate so we will look at possible ways these relate to one another:

- If we have mountains and rain in our country (physical), we may have big forests growing (biological). Those forests can be harvested to produce a market for export (economic & political) or to provide furniture in the schools and hospitals (cultural & social).
- If we have enough rain or lakes (physical), we can grow a large crop of rice (biological), enough to feed our own country (cultural & social) and export to others (economic & political).
- The banks (economic) have been created to provide care for the resources created by the sale of diamonds, gold, bananas and fish (physical and biological). This gives the government (political) enough resources to provide schools and hospitals (cultural & social).
- If we have a selfish dictator in power (political), most of the country's resources (physical & biological) will go into the dictator's bank account (economic) and the education and health systems (cultural & social) will suffer.
- If the church (cultural & social) understands the role God has given it, it can speak to the government and market systems (economic & political) to keep them moral, make sure that only crops that are good for people or the environment are produced (biological) and take care of the land (physical).

God intended only good for mankind but when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit sin entered the world and their relationship with God was cut off. They were sent out of the garden. No more conversations in “the cool of the day” with the Lord God. Animals became enemies and it was kill or be killed. What's more, the earth was cursed, and now working to get food from the ground would be hard toil. *All* relationships were affected—their relationships with one another, with God and with creation. From here on out, all of creation, including everything humanity might create would be stained by sin—nothing would be perfect anymore. Thus, sin touched and tainted everything: physical, biological, economic, political, cultural and social—absolutely everything.

Soon things deteriorated and God could stand no more of man's wickedness. He “was so grieved that he had made man” that he decided to wipe humanity and all the animals from the face of the earth (Gen. 6). However, Noah had found favor in God's eyes so God spared Noah and his family, as well as two of each animal so they might begin again. When Noah came out of the Ark, God told them:

be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything (Gen. 9:1-3).

We can see in this, the “dominion mandate” repeated. Although the relationships have changed because of the curse that sin brought into our world, God again gave everything into our hands. We are still to rule over nature by caring for it.

Furthermore, God promised to both humanity *and* “every living creature” that he would never again flood the whole earth:

Then God said to Noah and his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature

that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth. So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth” (Gen. 9:8-17).

Check out that Scripture—6 times God says he is making this covenant—this promise—with all the *living creatures* on earth. This includes man, but it also specifically singles out living, breathing creatures other than human beings. If God values all of his creation so much to make this promise to all of them, how can we dare think we can use his creation to suit our own purposes? Rather, he expects us as people created in his image to value and care for this earth and its creatures as he does. He has assigned us this responsibility.

Our merciful God did not leave us in our sin, without hope. Already in Genesis Chapter 3, we see the promise of one who would come to defeat our enemy (Gen. 3:15). To fulfill that promise Jesus came into this world of trouble and hopelessness, this world bound by the curse of sin. He inaugurated his public ministry by going into the local synagogue and reading the following:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18-19).

This was exciting news—he came to change society! He declared that the kingdom of God had arrived. The proof was seeing the sick healed, the dead raised, the hungry fed, and the demon possessed set free (Matt. 11:2-5). He proclaimed startling good news to the poor, with new values and new ways to respond to those who oppressed them: forgive those who hate you or use you in terrible ways. His was a radical new way of living, an example of how God intends people to live in the middle of this wicked world and be an influence on society. Things did not suddenly become perfect, but Jesus restored relationships, between the people and God, between father and son, between neighbors.

Eyes were opened once again to see the bigger picture of what God is doing in history, what He intends for this world and how He desires us to live: in harmony with Him, in harmony with one another and in harmony with creation. John 3:16-17 tell us:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send

his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

I have heard this verse quoted all my life. I always understood that God sent Jesus to save all the people in the world. However, this is only partially what John was writing here. The word “world” in this text is the word *cosmos* in Greek. *Cosmos* is a much bigger term than just all the people on earth. *Cosmos* is *all* of creation. Let’s re-read that scripture and substitute “all of creation” for “world.”

For God so loved *all of creation* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into *all of creation* to condemn *all of creation*, but to save *all of creation* through him.

When sin entered the world it totally affected *all of life*, all of creation—not just the people. *All* relationships were affected. The problem was total. The solution needed to be total, as well. Jesus came to be the complete and total solution to the whole world’s problems. This includes our relationship with God (as we usually think of this scripture), but it also includes our relationships with one another and with all the rest of creation. Jesus came to restore right relationships. This is true *shalom*—peace in the community.

This does not mean that Jesus died on the cross to “save” a tree and bring it everlasting life! Rather, it means that in providing the way for the power of sin to be broken, He will also bring about creation’s release from the curse of sin over it. Romans 8:19-22 tells us:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

I wonder what this earth will look like when the curse is finally lifted completely. If we look at the promises God made to the Israelites concerning their crops if only they would obey his commandments (see Deut. 28)), we can see that it is God’s intention to release abundance even today, here and now. This abundance would include enough food to eat, health for our families, and good economies for our nations. We do not need to remain passive in our neediness, praying for *someday* God’s kingdom to come. God wants to extend his kingdom here and now. It will not be perfect in this day and age because we do still contend with sin, but it can be a foretaste of what He wants to do in this world. He has already provided the way.

It is also imperative that we realize that we are not to be ruled by nature or by spirits living inside animals, mountains, rivers or anything else. Jesus told his disciples, “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.” (Luke 10:19) We do not need to fear those spirits who would try to gain power over us through embodying nature around us. This is truly good news!

Because Jesus came to be the complete and whole answer to sin in this world, we must understand how He dealt with people in all the areas of their lives, not just the spiritual areas. He touched people where they were broken or hurting and brought healing and wholeness into their lives. For example, remember Zacchaeus who wanted to see Jesus, but he was so short he

climbed up in a tree (Luke 19:1-10)? He was a despised tax collector. No one would spend time with him for he was a traitor to the people. After all, he was helping the hated Romans by collecting taxes for them. And besides all that, he was cheating the people and getting rich on their money. Imagine the surprise in the crowd when Jesus looked up at Zacchaeus perched on a branch up in that tree and told him, "I must stay at your house today." Luke was being generous when he said the people "muttered" at this. I imagine that "muttering" was pretty loud and unanimous complaining, people saying,

"Jesus says he comes to help the poor, and then he goes off to stay at a rich man's house. And not just any rich man—one who is a cheating tax collector and does such evil to us poor people. Doesn't he realize he's honoring this rascal?!"

But Zacchaeus stands up at the meal and promises to give half of everything he owns to the poor and to pay back anyone he has cheated, four times what he took from them. Jesus responds by saying that salvation has come to Zacchaeus' house that day. But what had Jesus done? We don't know what he said to Zaccheus but he did go to eat with him. Jesus offered relationship and fellowship to lonely Zacchaeus. When the community looked at Zacchaeus they saw a hard-hearted, miserably rich man who deserved no friends and could only keep them if he bribed them. But Jesus saw a man with a need for true friendship. Consequently Zacchaeus was saved and the community was changed because they would no longer have a cheating tax collector on their backs. Instead, he pledged to restore wrongfully gained money. Justice had come to the community.

Remember the story when Jesus raised the dead young man and restored him to his widowed mother? We can look at this story and think it is only about Jesus having compassion on the widow for her sorrow. But that is not the whole story. Luke 7:12-15 tell us that this young man was the only son of this widow. In that culture it meant he was also her only livelihood unless others were to take pity on her. When Jesus restored her son to her, he also gave her back her means of support. This is also true of Mary and Martha (John 11:17-44). With no husbands and their brother, Lazarus, dead they also would have no means of living. When Jesus restored these relationships, he also gave them the physical means to go on living.

When Jesus calmed the sea (Matt. 8:24-27) or walked on water (John 6:19-21) he certainly demonstrated his "dominion" over creation. He provided great catches of fish twice for Peter and the other disciples; he fed the five thousand, and the four thousand, once again proclaiming God's desire to abundantly bless his people.

Jesus is the total solution to life's problems. If we compartmentalize Jesus' ministry by only saying he came to provide salvation, we rob ourselves of the magnitude of what Jesus has provided for us. He came to bring abundant life (John 10:10) here and now. It is God's will that we realize the huge scope of the solution he has provided.

Finally, we will look at the Biblical response to the secular and animistic worldviews' contentions that "resources are limited." Generally speaking, we all believe that there is only a certain amount of oil or other minerals such as gold, silver or titanium in the earth. Those resources do not renew themselves by themselves. Once they are gone, they are gone. However, there is no such limitation with God. Look at examples of God's multiplication of resources outside of nature:

- Creation: God created all things out of nothing. “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made from what was visible.” (Heb. 11:2)
- Elijah, the widow, and her son fed by meal and oil that did not stop (I Kings 17:7-14)
- The widow’s oil multiplied (poured out into multiple jugs) II Kings 4:1-7
- Elisha feeds 100 men with 20 loaves of bread (II Kings 4:42-44)
- Jesus feeds 5000 men (plus women and children) with 5 loaves and 2 fish (Matt. 14:13-23)

There are many illustrations throughout church history of God providing for his people when there simply seemed to be no resources. Usually God start with something, a little oil, a little meal, a few loaves and multiplies these. He rarely starts from nothing. Even Jesus temptation to turn stones into loaves of bread, which he could have done, started with something in the natural realm, stones.

However, there is another arena where God meets life’s problems through giving creativity. Where we make the mistake in our thinking is to believe that “things” are our only resources. Shimon Peres (former Israeli Prime Minister) said that in 1995 Israel would make more money from its brains than Saudi Arabia from all their oil wells. This was an accurate statement because resources do not depend solely on physical items, but also on the creativity and ideas of the human mind.

Being created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26) means that, among other things, we have a personality, will, the ability to think and the ability to be creative. When we look around us, it is obvious how creative God is. He loves creativity. He created us to look differently, think differently, and feel differently. He could have made us all look alike and act alike. How boring! God loves the differences in each one of us. Not only that, but He has created thousands and thousands of different animals, birds, fish, insects and plants. There are scientists studying in the Amazon that find a new species of animal, bird, plant or insect every day of the year. Even with all the years people have been studying these things, they are still finding new ones.

We can never be as creative as God. “God said” and it came to be, whether it was light, sky, the sea, the land, animals, fish, birds or man. We do not have the power to speak things into existence from nothing. However, each and every one of us has a measure of God’s creativity in us. Some are perhaps more gifted at drawing pictures or writing songs or poetry. But those are not the only ways to apply our creativity so the rest of us do not need to despair that we have been left out. Some of the best ways to use our creativity is to create ways to solve our own problems.

Years ago I used to work for a big corporation, writing computer programs and teaching people to use their computers. One day a problem was brought to us to solve. The two men in my group worked for hours on the problem and finally gave up in disgust, saying it could not be done. At that point, I asked to see it. They laughed, thinking I would never figure it out, but they gave it to me. I went away to my desk and as I sat down I prayed silently, “Lord, what is wrong with this thing? How can we make it work?” I then proceeded to try different things on the computer that came into my mind. Within two hours I had the problem solved. I took it back to the other guys and dropped it on the desk, saying simply, “Try this.”

As I walked away I heard them saying, “This will never work!” but a few minutes later they came to me, “How come this works? This shouldn’t work? Why does it?” Then I was in

trouble! I had to confess I didn't know "why" it worked but that "I just had creative ideas and one of them had worked." I had asked God to help me come up with a solution and He had.

Another time in Liberia we had a problem with getting water. Often the pressure was too low for the water to come into the faucets in the house, so we would get water from a faucet outside which was only about 15 centimeters above ground. We would put a short hose onto the end of the faucet and then run the tube up into a bucket and collect our water this way. However, some days even this was too high for the water pressure to reach. One day I came to collect some water. I pulled the hose off the faucet and watched the water drip very slowly from the tap. It was very slow and regular, but the pressure was too low to force the water up into the bucket. I said to the young men in the yard, "This is totally unacceptable." They shrugged and advised me to get water from the sea, instead. "No way!" I replied. "Please bring me a shovel." They looked at me like I was crazy, but brought the shovel. I dug a hole next to the faucet and dropped the bucket into the hole. It was now below the height of the faucet and the water could drip, drip, drip into it directly, without the hose. The men just looked at it and shook their heads in skepticism. Half an hour later I came back and triumphantly collected my bucket of water. This then became our regular back-up method for collecting water. I never had to dig the hole again—the men kept it open. However, if one of us hadn't applied our creative thought processes to our problem, we would all have been hauling water from much longer distances.

These are small examples, but they illustrate how we can use creativity in our ordinary day-to-day life. God has given each of us the ability to be creative. Ask Him to help you be creative. He will help you use your brain to solve your problems. Another time in Liberia I had a visit from an elder from a church where I had taught on creativity. He brought the biggest chicken I had ever seen in Africa. I thought I was looking at a turkey. (I admit, I hadn't seen a big chicken in a long time.) He presented me with the chicken and told me it was all because of me that this chicken was so big. Now, I had a reputation for not liking live chickens so this was quite a surprise to me. I have never appreciated chickens running around the yard and into the houses, so I always said "the only good chicken is a dead chicken" (in the cooking pot, of course!). How could I be responsible for this big chicken? In answer to my question, he told me the story of their chicken feed. They had managed to find the money to import the baby chicks to start a business, but they did not have the money to pay for the imported feed. However, once they learned that they had been created to be creative and that God would help them to be creative, they sat down and thought about what they could put together to make their own feed. Now they were successfully growing gigantic chickens and their business was flourishing. I learned that affirming a group's creativity to solve their own problems can be a powerful form of empowerment.

Coming back to the thought that resources are limited, we need to realize that it is the ideas that people have had on how to use things that have made things valuable—not the thing itself. For example, until someone invented how to use oil in engines in the 1800's, oil was thought of as a nuisance, not a resource. Today we have what are called "silicone chips" in most electronic items. The silicone chip is at the heart of our whole electronic world and has made many people millionaires, but what is silicone made of? Sand. Yes, that's right, refined sand. Someone had the idea of how to use sand to make silicone and many others have had countless ideas about what to put on those silicone chips. Now companies who can produce silicone chips are wealthy.

In the 1860's a young man named George Washington Carver was a newly freed slave in the American south. George had a passion for growing things. All the neighbors would come to

George to find out what was wrong with their plants. Eventually, George managed to put himself through college and got a degree in biology. Cotton was the cash crop grown in the area George lived in, but some years insects would kill off the whole area's crop. George wanted to find something to help the farmers. He studied the problem and realized that the peanut plant could be the answer to the problem. At this time, the peanut was a weed that grew alongside the roads in the ditches. Few people ate peanuts. It was just considered a weed to be pulled and thrown away, but George learned that it was a fast-growing plant that put good nutrients into the earth which would help the cotton to grow better the next year. One year George convinced the local farmers to switch to growing peanuts to improve their next year's cotton crop. The farmers had all sown peanuts, rather than cotton, when it dawned on George that the farmers had trusted him too much. How were they going to make any money? They usually sold cotton for their money. Now they would have no cash crop because no one would buy peanuts. George realized he needed to find a market for peanuts so he took this problem to God. He prayerfully went into his laboratory and discovered over 100 ways to use the peanut plant! A partial list of things made from the peanut plant includes: margarine, soap, cooking and rubbing oils, cosmetics, milk (a whole glassful made with a handful of peanuts), flour, ink, dyes, shoe polish, creosote, salve, shaving cream, paper finer than linen, soil conditioner, insulating board, fuel briquettes, synthetic marble, mayonnaise, instant coffee, cheese, chili sauce, shampoo, bleach, axle grease, plastics and wallboard. The peanut plant went from being a weed on the side of the ditch to a valuable resource, all because one man applied his creativity to it. The wealth of the peanut was not in the peanuts, nor its root or leaves. No, the wealth was in the idea created in George Washington Carver's mind.

We cannot all be inventors like George Washington Carver, but at the same time, we have each been created in God's image and we all have a measure of God's creativity within us. Do we believe that we have dominion over creation and have the responsibility to be good rulers? I believe the world is full of wonderful things patiently waiting for our minds to grow smarter and we have only begun to tap into the things that God would want to see us create. Today the economy of the world seems to be held in the hands of those who have created industrial nations and those who own the oil to run those industries. Tomorrow may look completely different. Let's take our places in God's plan to create His destiny for our nations and get back to what God intended when He told us to rule over all the earth. God is waiting for us and believing for the potential He has put in each and every one of us.

## Lesson Twenty: Our Worldviews and Time

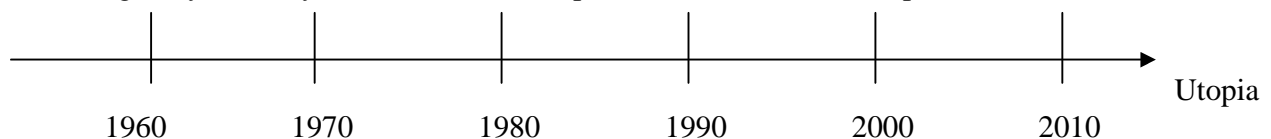
*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*  
(Jeremiah 29:11)

Whether or not we can believe deep in our hearts that God is willing and able to make changes today in our societies depends to a large extent on what we believe about “time.” If we have greater emphasis on the past, the present and future may suffer and it may be difficult to see change as possibly being a good thing. On the other hand, if we focus primarily on the future, today might disappear in frustration. Let’s look together at what the different worldviews believe about time.

### Secular thinking and Time

For someone with a secular worldview, time is considered a valuable resource. In fact, it is often scarce and should be “saved” for it can be wasted or lost. Above all, “time is money” for work and wages are tied to it. In effect, employers buy the time of their workers for work is assigned, deadlines set and wages are paid on the basis of time. Employees “clock in” or “clock out” to prove they were present. There never seems to be enough time to get everything done and people living this way are dominated by the speed in which time “passes.” “Time saving devices” are invented and used, but often seem to increase the speed at which people live, not provide the extra time promised.

From this view point, time is linear. We can diagram it on a “time-line.” In other words, it has a beginning and an end, and it flows by at a steady rate without repeating itself. Therefore, it can be measured and planned for. It may *seem* to flow faster or slower, depending upon the activities taking place (or lack of activities), but in reality, it is constant and can be relied upon. Man has devised instruments to measure time in incredibly small increments, allowing such things as an Olympic foot race to be won by a tenth of a second. Up until the 1600’s in Europe people understood time to move upward, in a linear fashion toward God. But during the 1600’s it was turned sideways, so that it ran horizontally toward a secular pursuit of progress. People thought if they cooperated with the laws of nature, society would grow economically and technologically and they would create a new paradise, some kind of utopia.



In this worldview time is very much future oriented and the goal is progress. It is the future, rather than the past that is important. The future is planned for as if it could be controlled and good times are expected someday in the future. Date books are kept to plan schedules often weeks and months in advance. For many people, there is little emphasis on learning history or maintaining a family or national tradition. Old ways may be easily rejected in favour of something new. Mottos like “today is the first day of the rest of your life” and “plan ahead” are taught to children at a young age. In this view, time is closely tied to faith in progress and action.



America is probably one of the most extreme examples of this kind of thinking. In much of Europe roads might be built deviating around some old barn or another old worthless-looking building, all in the name of conserving history. In America old buildings likely would be knocked down immediately in the name of progress, with the happy thought, “off with the old, on with the new.” After all, it is the future that is important, not the past.

There is a greater emphasis on the value of youth in this worldview. At work, the young are thought to be more active and productive, and to hold more promise than do the elderly, despite their experience and sense of responsibility. Once a person retires, they are viewed as having little to contribute to society. When they can no longer care for themselves, they are often put in nursing homes and cared for by non-relatives. It is not unusual to hear an older person remarking “I’m only as old as I feel,” trying to deny that age is catching up with them.

We can see in this worldview that time is, indeed, a “scarce, valuable” commodity to be “bought,” “saved,” “lost,” “wasted” or “used” wisely or foolishly. It is always passing like the sands in an hourglass and there is no way to stop it. Eyes are set on a better future somewhere off in the distance and we are striving to reach it. This worldview is geared toward change and progress, with progress being understood as something materially better than what we have right now. In fact, it would be fair to say that often in this worldview a person’s very faith is in progress.

### Animism & Time

The animistic worldview has a very different understanding of time. An African scholar, John Mbiti, studied 270 African languages looking at how words were used. He found that in all of the languages he studied there were no clear words for the future. There were plenty of different words to describe the long term past and dealing with ancestors and traditional values, but only a few to describe the present and even less to talk about the future. Often, the furthest into the future a language will go is to the next season. A missionary who has travelled to many parts of Africa has challenged the people to tell him if this is accurate about their mother tongues. At first, people often disagree, but when asked to tell us the words they use and then to explain how far into the future they reach, they all smile when they realize that yes; it is true even for their language.

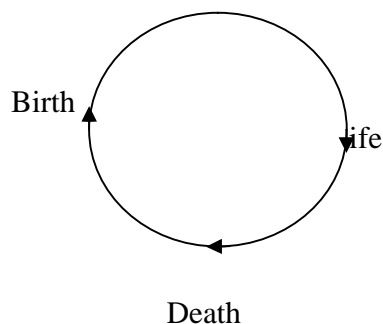
In Liberian English, if you wanted to refer to something happening immediately, you would have to say, “now, now” with an emphatic tone to my statement. Just one simple “now” or even casually saying “now, now” means anytime in the next few hours or sometime that day. This one word is used to refer to a time period stretching over anything from the next 10 minutes to all day. In many Middle Eastern cultures, “to say “tomorrow” simply means to acknowledge some vague moment in the future.” Again, if you really mean sometime in the next twenty-four hours, you need to say “tomorrow, tomorrow” twice to emphasis immediacy.

With the focus on the way things have always been time moves backward in this worldview while the future is relatively undefined. The value is on things that have happened in the past, on people who have come before and on the old way of doing things. Change is not a positive thing in this worldview. “Keeping the old ways” is important and new ways of doing things are looked on with great suspicion.

Another way of looking at time from this perspective is to see it as circular or cyclical. In many parts of Africa it is commonly believed that when an old man dies, he may be reborn as the next baby boy. I remember my confusion as I realized that several of the young children in my neighbourhood were named “Old Ma” or “Old Pa.” When I asked why they were called this, I

was informed that they were the reincarnation or re-embodiment of a grandfather or grandmother in the family. Sometimes it was just the next baby born after the old person died. At other times, it might be a grandchild who resembles the grandparent. Time, in this view, is going around in circles. There is birth, life, death, birth, life, death, birth, life death, in an endless circle. It is not going anywhere. Or it will often be expressed as: “My father was a farmer, I am a farmer, my son will be a farmer.” We can substitute many words in that sentence for “farmer” like, carpenter, drunk, teacher, religious leader, etc. But still, life goes on in an endless circle.

Circular View of Time:



Cyclical View of Time:

Rainy Season  
Dry Season  
Rainy Season  
Dry Season  
Rainy Season  
Dry Season

The world can also be defined in cycles; for instance, the rainy season is followed by the dry season, which is followed by the rainy season, which is then followed by the dry season, which is ended by the rainy season, which is followed, of course, by the dry season. You get the point.

We were running a roof-patching project in Monrovia, Liberia, the wettest city in the world (570 cm annual rainfall). The best time in my Western mind to fix a roof is when it is *not* raining. But during the dry season the roof is not leaking, so who needs their roof fixed? However, let it be a few weeks before the rains were expected, and all of a sudden, we were inundated with requests, many more than we could possibly handle before the rains began. We would try to work in the rain, but it was extremely difficult, so most of our “dry season” work was accomplishing what people had brought to us during the previous rainy season. In animistic thinking, the present problem is the one to deal with. Because of this, there is no reason to fix a roof in the dry season. It is not leaking. With so many other pressing problems today, they could not afford the luxury of dealing with “tomorrow’s” problem. It is clearly, and rightfully, not important to fix a roof in the dry season as there are many other more urgent issues to deal with today.

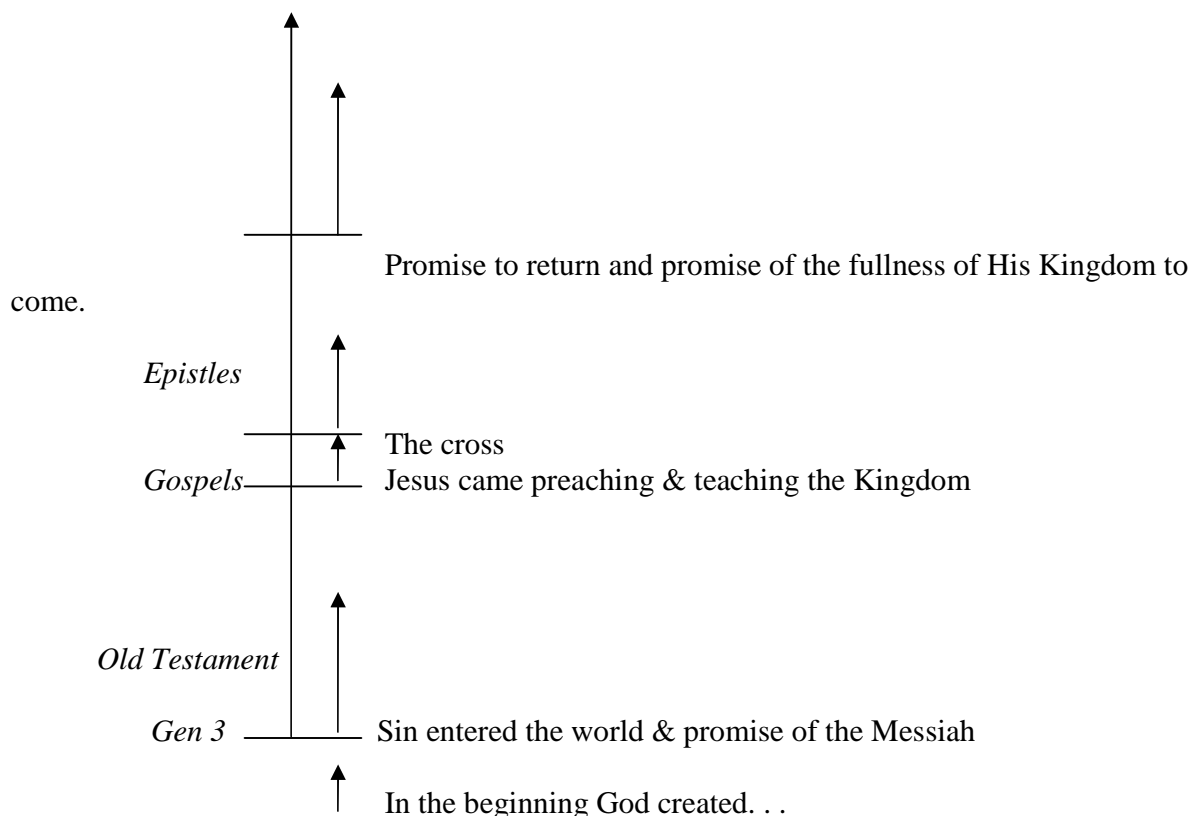
### The Biblical Worldview of Time

Our God is bigger than time because he created it (see Gen. 1:3-5). In fact, he is outside of time. It has no constraints on him. He is, indeed, the beginning and the end (Rev. 1:8). It is God who changes the times and seasons (Dan. 2:21). He was totally involved in the past; He is totally involved in the present; He will be totally involved in the future. Time does not run out for God. Indeed, “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day.” Think about that statement for a moment. If you spent a thousand years contemplating one day, then you would surely know every tiny detail that happened during that day. God is so far outside of time

that He can be that intimately involved in every detail of my life, of your life, of the lives of billions of other people today. On the other hand, He is also not in a hurry and what we might want done today, may be years in the making. I Tim. 6:14-15 tells us that Jesus will return when God brings it about in his own time. Time has no hold on God and it is not “running out” for him.

Unlike God, because we live in this world, as human beings we live “inside” time. Whether we recognize it, or not, time is moving on. In Psalm 90:12 we find Moses asking God to “teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Prior to this verse, (verse 10) Moses remarks that we live 70 or 80 years. Moses, himself, lived 120 years so I believe he was talking about the norm, not a rule or law. Some people live much longer than 80 years; others do not reach even 40. We are all under the curse of death and will die, but we should join with Moses in asking God to teach us how to use our days best.

Time is linear, but I believe it is more Biblical to think of the line running vertically, rather than horizontally, moving toward God and his purposes. Things do not go around in circles, to be repeated endlessly. Yes, the seasons come and go, but people do not remain the same. They get older and wiser and eventually they die, but only once. They do not return again as a baby. Jesus dying on the cross was a one-time historic event. It is not repeated time after time. The effect of that one event transcends time, but it only happened once.



Although God is truly outside of time, our biblical time-line has a beginning, “in the beginning God created. . .” (Gen. 1:1). Creation began one day and things have never been the same since. When man sinned God immediately came with the promise of the Messiah who would come some day to redeem mankind. All of God’s people in the Old Testament were

looking forward to see God's promises fulfilled. In obedience Noah believed the flood would come, so he built the Ark. Moses believed God would deliver his people. David believed the Messiah would come from his family. The entire Old Testament builds toward what God would do to redeem his people. It was always looking forward. When we look at the New Testament, we see the Gospels looking toward the Cross. Once Jesus was raised from the dead, we see the rest of the New Testament (the Epistles) talking about how we should live today and looking forward to his return. This is the state we are in today, looking forward to when God will send Jesus to return and to see Satan overthrown and Jesus sit on the throne as the supreme ruler over all the earth. This view of time leaves room for progress, for vision, for growth and for development. We can believe that things are going to get better because we have a future hope.

I once heard someone say, "The world belongs to those who offer it hope." We are the people of hope because we have a true picture of the future. Proverbs 23:18 tells us "There is surely a future for you, and your hope will not be cut off" and God says in Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you. . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." As Christians we have been saved (a past historical act when we accepted Jesus into our lives), and we have a "future hope" that we will be saved, that we will realize the fullness of that salvation when we die or Jesus returns (whichever comes first) and we will go to heaven. See Titus 1:2, 3:7; and I Thess. 5:8. On the other hand, the Bible tells us that the wicked are without God and without hope (Eph. 2:12). Proverbs 24:18-19 tells us "Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out."

One of my favorite chapters in the Bible is Hebrews 11. This is often called "the faith chapter" because it is full of people who were looking ahead to what God was going to do. However, they did not see the results they were hoping for. Look at what it says about them in Hebrews 11:13-16:

"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcome them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

I also want to be someone that God is not ashamed of so I must also trust in the promises that God has made and have faith, looking forward toward those things. While these people would remember the past, they did not dwell on it, only seeing what had been done. On the other hand they were not looking ahead just to see what kind of material progress they could make, either. They were looking for the fulfillment of God's will. We may get the idea that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and some of the others in the beginning of the chapter received what they were looking for. It is only those poor unnamed people later in the chapter who did not receive the fulfillment of the promise. But verses 39 and 40 tell us that NONE of them received it. They were looking for God's kingdom to come and we now join them, still looking for God's kingdom in its fullness. To the extent that we believe and look for God's will, we are also aliens and strangers on earth and, in effect, "outside of time" ourselves. We are building toward a future that cannot be seen in fullness today.

Once again, we must realize that the secular and animistic worldviews have taken the truth about time and carried it to extremes, thus distorting what God intended for us. The secular worldview would have us focus primarily on the future and building for a better future. But when we get so wrapped up in the future and working toward progress that we lose our perspective, life becomes distorted. We easily move toward anxiety and worry over materialistic things. What Jesus told us in Matthew 6:31-34 is especially appropriate today:

“So do not worry, saying ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

We must not worry about “things” but look to the bigger picture, understanding God’s eternal purposes and believe and work toward those purposes in our lives and in the lives of those around us. “Seek first the Kingdom of God,” that is, the presence and reign of God in our lives and the lives of others.

The animistic worldview, on the other hand, struggles with believing that change might be positive. With a biblical view of time there is room for progress and growth that takes you forward into God’s will. Proverbs 29:18 tells us “without a vision the people perish.” We are the people with the vision of what God wants to do on this earth. We cannot allow ourselves to be chained to the past. We must grab hold of this idea of working toward the future kingdom God will bring to this earth. Martin Luther, a great theologian, once said that if he knew God was coming tomorrow, today he would plant a tree if that was God’s will for today. Let us be doing today the kingdom things God wants to build for tomorrow.

## **Our Worldviews and Work**

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Col. 3:23-24*

It would be rare for someone to go all the way through life without working in some way or another. Some work is easier than other work, but whether we are farming our own land, running our own business, putting in set hours at a job paid by someone else, or taking care of a household, most of us are working at some time on something. If not, we probably have worked in the past or want to work now or in the future. We are going to look at “work” now in the light of the different worldviews for how we understand work is vital to our growth as believers and the role that we have in seeing God’s kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

### Secular & Animistic Worldviews

Both the secular and animistic worldviews believe that work is a curse. Work is done in order to survive, rather than something done joyfully. In a poorer country, the goal will most likely be to provide food, clothing, shelter and education. In a richer nation, one might be wealthy enough not to worry about basic survival needs so the goal of work may be to work

enough to earn an early retirement. Whether the nation is rich or poor, the belief is the same: work is a curse and if one had a choice one would either not work at all, or, at best, find some other work that is more fulfilling, pays more, or is easier to do.

In both worldviews a person's identity and/or status in society is measured by his/her occupation. Often this also determines a person's value as well. Thus, some roles are more revered than others. "If only I could be a \_\_\_\_\_, then I would be more respected." What occupation belongs in the blank will greatly vary from one culture to another, so fill in the blank with whatever is most appropriate in your society. It might be a politician, successful sports player, pop star or actor. Or it might be the chief, medicine man, pastor or evangelist. In Liberia I met many a self-declared "evangelist." These young men would put on a badge, preach around town and expect to receive respect and support. Often the only difference between them and the other Christian unemployed young men in town was the "evangelist" badge they wore. Africa is not alone, however, in this attitude; in richer countries young people often refuse to take jobs below their educational level. This is a consequence of relying upon our occupational role to define our value and status.

### Biblical Worldview

From the Biblical perspective, work is not a curse; it is a gift! How can that be? What about when Adam and Eve sinned and God cursed the ground and told Adam "through painful toil you will eat of it" (Gen. 3:17)? Sound rather negative? But we need to go further back, before sin: God gave work as a gift to Adam and Eve. Genesis 1:28-30 says that "God *blessed* them" and then told them what they were to do: be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, subdue the earth and rule over all the creatures—fish, birds, animals. Genesis 2:19-20 tells us that God also brought to Adam all the animals in the world for Adam to name. That sure sounds like work to me! I like to think of the roles listed here as Adam's "job description." All of this was *given* to Adam before sin entered the world. Man was designed to work. It is not something made up as a result of the fall. Of course, work got harder because of sin and like everything else in creation, work was also affected by sin. Remember, He told Noah to have dominion over the earth, to work it and care for it—this was after the fall, after sin entered the world, after the ground was cursed. Surely, God would not tell us to do something that is evil.

Work is a very big subject in the Bible. There are nearly 400 verses with the word "work" in them, and that does not count all the verses that deal with the subject, but use a different word. Let's look at a few verses in Proverbs:

***Prov. 10:4    Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.***

Someone who is diligent is one who is active and determined in their work, but also decisive and eager. In other words, this is someone who is excited about what they do and wants to make sure they do their absolute best.

***Prov. 12:11    He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment.***

I knew a pastor in Liberia who was also a university professor. During the war, he and his family escaped with only the clothes on their backs. They lost absolutely everything else. He found a temporary place to live and he noticed there was fertile ground near them that was not being tilled, so he asked his neighbors if he could grow some things on their land and borrow their tools to do it. They said, "Sure" and loaned him everything he needed. A year later, this pastor was again driving around town in a decent car,

sending his children to school and providing for his family. The neighbors whose land and tools he borrowed were exactly in the same poor place they had been when he started.

**Prov. 12:24** *Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.*

It is those who do their work with diligence that get promoted to better positions. Those who relax in laziness will always work for other people for less profit.

**Prov. 13:4** *The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.*

A friend of mine in Liberia needed to support his family. Instead of sitting around talking about it, as most of his friends did, he borrowed enough money to buy a few things to carry around on the street to sell. Soon he was making enough money to provide for his family. Then, based on the record of his diligence, he easily got a loan to pay for him to attend secretarial school. It took about a year of selling on the street and studying the rest of the time, for him to get the education necessary to get a good job to support his family. I'll never forget the day he came to proudly report that he now had a good job and was able to easily support his family. He was talking about other ways he was going to continue on to better their situation, as well.

**Prov. 18:9** *One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.*

Anyone who has worked with someone who is lazy or just does not care about the result understands this principle. Work that is poorly done is often worse than not done at all and can cause a lot of destruction in a farm, business or office.

**Prov. 22:29** *Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before Kings; he will not serve before obscure men.*

We had an honest mechanic who serviced our car in Liberia. He only fixed things that were really broken and often gave us advice on how to manage things more inexpensively. Often I used him as an example of a diligent worker when I taught this subject in Liberia and usually the pastors present were anxious to know who this amazing mechanic was. Eventually, this man went on to become the president's mechanic. He no longer serves before "obscure men" but God blessed him and gave him honor for his integrity in his work.

Maybe you are thinking that I have only used Old Testament verses so this does not apply to us today. If so, check out II Thessalonians 3:6:10:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: **"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."**

And if that is not enough, look at what Jesus told us in John 5:17: "My Father is always at his work to this very day and I, too, am working." Philippians 2:13 tells us that "it is God who

works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” I, for one, am glad that God is still at work! Otherwise, why bother to pray? We need to realize that God cannot be under a curse. Therefore, work itself, is not a curse but the means God has given us to affirm our dignity and glorify God.

Secondly, work, itself, is a sacred task; it is important and it matters. From Colossians 3:23-24 we can see that our work is a service to the Lord:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

In God’s Kingdom, it is not *what* the particular work is that is important, but rather, *how* we do it. In other words, it is our heart attitude that is important to God as we work, not the type of work we are doing.

A young woman told me her testimony: “When I was a young adult I went to Israel to work on a kibbutz as a volunteer worker. A ‘kibbutz’ is made up of a group of people who live in community together, sharing the work and the fruits of their work. Each kibbutz combines agriculture and some kind of industry. It was this system that enabled Israel to develop very quickly. The kibbutz I worked on grew cotton and had a Styrofoam form factory. All the meals were provided for everyone in a big dining room and served buffet-style with everyone coming through a line to get their food. On this particular kibbutz we changed jobs every week so if something was particularly bad, at least we had the consolation of knowing we would have a different job the next week. One week I finally got assigned the one job all us volunteers hated: working in the dining room to keep the bins of food filled so everyone always had a full choice of food as they went through the line. Believe me, this was not as simple as it seemed. If I was a few seconds late in getting replacement food into the bin, people screamed in my face. If a bin happened to go empty when I didn’t notice, then I was really in trouble. Because of the personalities involved, it was a high stress job. No one liked this job.

“I patiently endured my week of working in the dining room. I worked hard not to get angry (at least on the outside) with all those who were screaming at me. At the end of the week I was feeling pretty good about myself because I had exercised such good self control even in the face of all those others losing their self control. I thought I deserved a pretty good pat on the back. What a good Christian witness I was being. So I went to the bulletin board to see where I would be working the following week. At least I knew it wouldn’t be as bad as this week had been. I found my name on the sheet next to the dining room again. What?! How can this be? No one gets the same job two weeks in a row, even if they had requested it. Immediately, I thought, “God must want me to learn something here. I better work on my inner attitude more.” So I prayed and asked God to help me to have the right attitude. I must say I did much better that week, both outwardly and inwardly. I managed to fill up the bins more cheerfully and quickly so I didn’t get yelled at quite so often, and when they did scream I didn’t get angry or offended inside. At the end of the week I went confidently to the bulletin board, sure that I had learned my lesson now and would be released from the job. I was shocked to again see “dining room” next to my name. Impossible! Again, I went back to the Lord and prayed. This time I realized that an even deeper work needed to be done in my heart. As I submitted to the Lord and realized that I was doing that work for Him, not for the grouchy people around me, something changed inside me. Things went even more smoothly, both inside me and in the work so that by the end of the week I liked the job and hoped to keep it. What changed? It certainly wasn’t the people I was



working for and the tasks, themselves, were exactly the same. No, the only thing that changed was my attitude. As I shifted my focus to the Lord, everything else got less important.

“I learned a serious lesson in those three weeks that I have carried throughout my life: It is not *what* we do that matters, but *who* we do it for and *how* we do it. No matter what we are doing, whether it is being a car mechanic, a teacher, a doctor, a farmer or housewife (or all 5!), if our minds and hearts are focused on God as the One we are doing it for, then we are pleasing God. Somehow it also sets us free inside to enjoy those tasks we are doing. Even unpleasant, difficult tasks can glorify God if we are doing it with the right attitude.”

Going back to before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve were created to work. We have been created in God’s image and He is at work to this very day. Work was meant to be something that gives us fulfillment. Furthermore, we need people to work in every area of life. Remember that in Figure 3 (Chapter 3), we saw that physical, biological, economic, political, social and cultural areas of life are interconnected. We will not eat if we do not have farmers or fishermen; we will have no homes without builders; we will have no way to communicate with people around the world without postal systems and telephones. All of these jobs are important and can bring fulfillment to a person who knows for Whom he or she is working. I believe that as a part of our role in filling, ruling and subduing the earth, God intended us to create those systems we need to run our societies and He meant for us to do those things to His glory bringing us a sense of pleasure and satisfaction well done. Sin has clouded the issue and made work difficult, but it has not robbed us totally of what God intended work to be. He has given us back the key: whatever we do, if we do it diligently to our best ability and for God, rather than for man, then we will find contentment and purpose in our work.

## Lesson Twenty-One: Our Worldviews & Poverty

*My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them." Ps. 35:10*

We have a choice about *how* we look at the problem of poverty in the world around us. Do we have the "mind of Christ" as we look at this issue? All too often, we judge the problem of poverty through our old, comfortable worldviews. This leads to incorrect conclusions as to the definition of "poverty," its root causes and how to solve them.

### Secular Worldview

Because in the secular worldview true reality is physical, the secular thinker will define poverty in a materialistic sense. The amount of "things" one owns defines one's level of poverty or wealth. I remember sitting in a car parked beside a pile of garbage in Albania, Central Europe, one afternoon. I was amazed as I noticed the number of satellite dishes hanging on the sides of apartment buildings. I knew they had little electricity. Just then a man went by me on a donkey cart, talking on his cell phone. It was a startling mixture of things I would use in secular thinking to define poverty and wealth:

Garbage piled on the street = poverty  
Satellite dishes for television = wealth  
Little electricity = poverty  
Cell phone = wealth  
Donkey cart = poverty

Notice that the reference for the definition of poverty in this case is material things. A dictionary defines poverty as "the lack of means to satisfy a person's basic needs for nutrition, housing, clothing, and other essentials of life." It goes on to explain that "poverty" may also mean that one has less than those around them, but not necessarily nothing. In either case, it is referring to a lack of physical resources.

In this worldview it is believed that one of the underlying causes of poverty is something in evidence that can be clearly seen: structural injustice. Certain types of government and economic systems or "structures" in place are unjust and these are causing the poverty. If we can just change those structures, then everything would be OK. Even wars and natural disasters can be eliminated or their effects reduced if the right structures are in place. For example, several years ago there were two earthquakes of similar power. One was in Turkey and the other was in the United States (Seattle). Severe devastation occurred in Turkey and thousands of people died or lost everything. The earthquake in Seattle caused some buckling to the international airport runway, but little other damage. Contrary to Turkey, Seattle has a stringent building code designed to provide structural integrity in the case of an earthquake. Things were shaken, but not destroyed where the "right structures" were in place.

Looking at Africa, colonization would be at the heart of this structural injustice, although modern government structures (both in Africa and elsewhere) should also be considered contributing factors. Thus, the United Nations, World Bank, IMF and various wealthy nations have sought to find the key which would unlock the potential of the poorer nations. Structural readjustment has been demanded of the poorer nations by those with money before loans or grants would be released in an effort to reduce corruption and selfishness and force the poorer

nations to fit into a Western form of economic structure. Unfortunately, much to the embarrassment of those requiring structural readjustment, it seems only the rich have benefited in country after country, while the poor have just gotten poorer.

The over-consumption of Western nations, depleting the poorer nations, is also a factor in structural injustice. Quite often the solution put forth to solve this problem is to do resource redistribution. In other words, it is to give to poor nations money and other physical resources. This has been tried in various ways, but the end result seems to again benefit only a select few. The less powerful voices are speaking in the wealthier nations about the problem of over-consumption, but this seems to be an issue the wealthier nations are unwilling to face. Thus, a wealthy democratic nation may enjoy the fruits of its wealth while at the same time may be struggling with the guilt that it is not able to find a way to bring other nations up to its material or physical level.

### Animistic Worldview

An animist will define poverty as a “lack of power over the spirits.” Problems such as AIDS, war, flood, drought, no money, unjust laws, and ethnic hatred are caused by the spirits. Someone may have cursed him, or perhaps he has not done something he should have done to make the spirits feel good about him. Somehow, he has gotten the spirits angry with him, or someone else is angry and has gotten the spirits against him. His solution is to find out what needs to be done (sacrifices, fetishes, etc.) to make the spirits look upon him positively or to gain control over the spirits so he may triumph over others who would want to put him down.

### Biblical Worldview

Notice that in both the secular and animistic worldviews, poverty is something *outside* of man. While the Biblical worldview would recognize that disease, war or structural injustice all contribute to the problem of physical poverty, it does not see any of these as the real root of the problem. According to the Bible, the problem is inside us: we are spiritually dead and cursed by sin. Because of this, man uses creation wickedly and treats fellow man inhumanely. We have generated both personal sin (through what we personally do) and corporate sin (through the systems we have set up and non-biblical values ruling our nations). We have unclean hearts, wrong-thinking minds and an unbiblical lifestyle. But thank God, Jesus has provided the solution to all our problems: we must be born again, and to see our minds, lifestyles and cultures renewed.

When Jesus began his ministry on earth he went into the synagogue and read from Isaiah 61:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.”

And what was that good news for the poor?

“He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and to provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. . . They will rebuild the ancient ruins, and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been

devastated for generations. For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity.” Isaiah 61:1-4, 8

Take a few moments to imagine what it would look like to see those with broken marriages made whole, to have those who are captives to drugs or alcohol in your community set free from their sin and the effects of sin upon their lives, and to have a community that is relating with one another joyfully, instead of living in despair. Those healed people will rebuild and restore our communities, for what are the “long devastated” places, if not our communities? God loves justice and wants to break down the man-made structures or spiritual forces that would try to enslave us in poverty.

A few years ago I did a study of justice in the Bible. I expected to find lots of things about rules (thou shalt not. . . ) and all the consequences of breaking those rules. Yes, those things were there, but I was very surprised to discover that God’s concern with justice was much more about economic justice than anything else. For instance, He instigated the “Year of Jubilee” to happen every 50<sup>th</sup> year as a means for those who had suffered economically to have their land restored to them if they had not already regained the means to buy back their land (Lev. 25:25-28). In this way, the descendants of those who had made mistakes or had suffered injustices were to be given the opportunity to become again active members of society, instead of beggars and slaves. There were laws designed to provide resources for the poor: instead of making sure that every bit of the harvest was cleaned out of a field, the poor were to be allowed to go through the fields and pick up the leftovers (Lev. 19:10; 23:22); every seventh year the fields were to be allowed to grow on their own and the poor were supposed to be allowed to do the full harvest in these years (Exodus 23:11); nor was interest to be charged to a poor Israelite because this would cause him to get hopelessly in debt (Exodus 22:25). Isaiah warned the Israelites:

“Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.” (Isaiah 10:1)

Likewise, Ezekiel warned the Israelites when he brought the word of the Lord to say that the sin of Sodom was that they did not help the poor and needy! Instead, they were overfed, arrogant and unconcerned (Ezekiel 16:49-50). We usually assume that it was only sexual sins that caused the downfall of Sodom, but no, it was also their failure to care for the poor and needy in their community. God is serious about this!

In the Old Testament Moses told the Israelites:

“However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.” (Deut. 15:4)

But in the very same chapter, later Moses says:

“There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in the land.” (Deut. 15:11)

Sometimes I have heard people use Jesus’ similar statement that “we will always have the poor with us” (Mt. 26:11) as an excuse not to do anything about poverty. Jesus ministered constantly to the poor and He gave to the poor so obviously, He did not mean we were to do nothing. Instead, I believe this was an acknowledgment by both Jesus and Moses that because of sin in this world that no matter what we do, there will always be some poor people. Again, poverty is a

result of sin, whether it is structural sin (unjust laws or economic systems in place) or personal sinful decisions.

Biblically, gifts to the poor were designed not to be simple handouts, but the means by which the poor could regain their place in society as a viable, functioning member. (See for instance: Deuteronomy 15:7-15.) It is much more complicated to give a gift that will provide someone with the means to become an active, contributing member in the community than it is to simply drop a few coins in a beggar's bowl. Often, this only soothes our consciences. Instead, as the people of God, we should be seeking to bring the whole solution Jesus has provided to the community: right relationship with God in all areas of life (Jn. 3:16-17).

Below is a chart that a group of Christian community development workers came up with as they discussed the difference between what God's intentions were for us before sin entered the world vs. what this world looks like as a result of our sinfulness. Notice that there is poverty or "lack" in every area of life. Poverty is not just physical.

Break into small groups and compare what God wants for us and how this has been damaged by the effects of sin. In your discussion describe what society would look like if the power of the Gospel could bring transformation in the lives of people to move them back to what God's intention for us is.

What God Wants for us Intellectually:	Influence of Sin on us Intellectually:
To know God	Know good and evil
Know how to manage resources	Not in control
Ability to learn	Intellectual capacity reduced
Knowledge of ourselves and others	Lack of care for creation
Ability to think and be creative	Knowledge used for destruction
Wisdom	Ignorance
Decision making ability (will)	Mental illness
Healthy identity	Marred identity
Understand creation	Selfish destruction/misuse of resources
Sharing of gifts (complementary abilities)	Pride and deception
Knowledge to be used for good	Told how to think (manipulation)
Able to express emotions appropriately	Psychological disorders
What God Wants for us Physically	Influence of Sin on us Physically:
Health	Sickness, disease, injuries
Reproduction	Pains in childbirth
Peace between animals and mankind	Enemies with animals/hatred, war
Balance (no natural disasters)	Floods, earthquakes, forest fires, etc.

Clean water	Pollution
Moderate climate	Drought, deserts
Enough food	Gluttony, famine
Security	Fear, death
Abundant harvests	Insect infestation, weeds
<b>What God Wants for us Spiritually</b>	<b>Influence of Sin on us Spiritually</b>
Obedience	Separation
Daily intimate relationship with God	Fear, guilt, shame, sin, selfishness
Talking to him as if he were present	No relationship with God/idolatry
Involved in every part of our lives	Lack of fellowship
Dependent fellowship	Worship of creation versus creator
Transparency	Negative view of God
Everlasting love	Spiritual bondage (demonic)
Spiritual part of us fully active	Hostility against God
Modeled on trinity	Giving authority to Satan
<b>What God Wants for us Socially</b>	<b>Influence of Sin on us Socially</b>
Fellowship	Isolation, loneliness
Interdependence	Independence
Love and harmony	Hate and war
God-centered	Self-centered
Community	Prejudice, competition
Good communication	Arguments, misunderstandings
Healthy family	Divorce
Justice	Unfair markets, false imprisonment
Holy government	Corruption, bribery, selfish dictatorship
Sharing resources	Greed, hoarding
Respect	Abuse

With a Biblical worldview of poverty we should understand that poverty is more than a lack of material things. It is also poverty of relationships that may be evidenced in broken homes, tribalism, and discrimination according to race. It is intellectual poverty seen in poor education or lack of opportunities. It is spiritual poverty when there is no growing relationship with God in evidence. Unlike the animist who would need to do sacrifices or prepare fetishes, or the secularist who might advocate resource redistribution, the Biblical worldview's method to

achieve the solution to poverty is to have sin forgiven, to be transformed as people into the new creation that God makes, to grow in relationship with God, and see our communities renewed and growing toward spiritual, physical and social wholeness. God can and will bless us and our communities as we seek to do His will in our communities.

When you lead people to Christ in a community where the Gospel has never been and you disciple people in the ways of the Kingdom, obviously there will be transformation not only in their lives but in how they live, how they relate to others, and how they live out their lives as people representing God and the Kingdom of God. The Gospel is wider than just sharing the good news of salvation and planting churches. The new believers and new churches are salt and light in their communities and through prayer and living as believers who have new values and new lives can transform communities into places that reflect the goodness and grace of God.

### **From Inward Cleansing to Outward Focus**

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:22-27)*

In order to see our worldviews changed we must do several things. First of all, we must ask God to change us. We cannot purify and change ourselves. We must want it and seek after it, but we cannot cleanse ourselves. Secondly, we must cast aside wrong thoughts that are identified. Thirdly, we must act on those new beliefs because the fruit of a changed worldview is a changed lifestyle.

A missionary from the West told me of his experience. He said, “I remember the first time I identified some animistic beliefs in my own culture and cast them aside, embracing a Biblical way of thinking and acting. One of the Western animistic beliefs is that a person will receive 7 years of bad luck if he walks under a ladder. However, I had just learned that in God’s kingdom there is no such thing as ‘luck.’ There are consequences God has promised we will face if we sin; there is blessing we can expect if we follow His ways; and there is His promise to carry us through the ups and downs of life as we follow His will; but there is no such thing as a positive force outside of God called ‘luck.’ I went outside and put a ladder up against the house and proceeded to run back and forth under it, determined to prove that I was set free from bondage to that wrong thinking. Sounds crazy? Maybe so, but it was also very liberating to throw aside other beliefs about things which would bring good or bad luck. Then I had to learn to change my words. It is often you will hear Americans wishing one another, ‘good luck.’ It is meant as a blessing. But if there is no such thing as luck, I should not be saying it. Admittedly, this was much more difficult because I heard the phrase constantly, but by God’s grace I was able to

adjust my speaking. As I practiced this new way of speaking and believing, it eventually overruled the wrong teaching I had in my culture and helped me to move easily toward trust in God, not luck, as the One in control of my destiny. Over the years I have often found it surprising as God put His finger on different ways I was not thinking Biblically but it has always been thrilling, too.”

We all want to see things as God sees them and break out of the darkness Satan desires to keep us trapped in. Satan would have us believe either that spirits do not exist and everything can be explained by physical causes or that spirits have absolute control over everything that happens. The Bible tells us that God is Spirit, but that He became man in Jesus Christ, that He created both the spirit and physical world, and that some things are caused by spirits, but other things have physical causes. We submit to God but do not submit to other spirits. Nor do we pretend that spirits do not exist. He has given us the gift of discernment to determine what we are dealing with in each situation. If we fall into the trap of swinging either to one extreme or the other (physical vs. spiritual), we are blinded and can easily move out of the will of God.

Satan would have us believe that wealth and resources are limited and either that this world is a “closed system” with no possibility of intervention by God, or that we are ruled by nature through the spirits embodying animals, rivers, trees, mountains, etc. These lies can keep us from developing into the people God would have us be. God wants us to trust Him for resources that we need. God has also created us to be creative. We are to use Spirit-guided creativity in solving our problems and moving toward God’s intentions in our communities. Sometimes, needed resources are created by our ideas. Today’s useless weed may be tomorrow’s resource. As believers we have authority over evil spirits—they do not control us. If we can break free from the physical bondage that this earth is all there is, or the spiritual bondage that evil spirits are in control, we will have room for growth and freedom to creatively see God’s kingdom come in our nations.

Satan would have us either ensnared to the tyranny of tomorrow at the expense of those in our lives today, or to fulfilling expectations of long-dead ancestors at the expense of believing for possible changes for the better. God would have us realize we are to remember the past and learn from it. At the same time, we are to look forward to tomorrow and God’s kingdom coming in its perfection. Today, we are to carry the hope for a perfect future in our hearts while we build toward it and prepare for it now.

Satan would have us believe that work is a curse. God wants us to know that work is a gift. In God’s economy, all work is important if it is done to the glory of God. No work is more holy than another, depending on the motives and heart attitudes involved. God designed this world that we would need people working in all spheres of life because everything is interdependent. If we are capable of working but cannot find work, this is Satan’s scheme, not God’s. God is at work today and He expects us to be at work as well.

Satan would have us believe that poverty is all about material things and that forces outside of man are the root cause of poverty. While the lack of possessions is an aspect of poverty, God would have us understand that we also face poverty in our relationships—physically, spiritually and socially. Our poverty is much bigger than material possessions but Jesus came to bring the solution. God would also have us realize that it is sin, not spirits, which is at the root of the issues in the community. Because it is our sin, we must take personal responsibility for the problems and believe for the creativity to solve the problems by the grace of God.



By this time, you must realize that changing the way we think is not just an academic or spiritual exercise to make us feel smarter or more holy. Rather, it is a vital step in our discipleship process which should move us closer to seeing God's will accomplished in our communities. When Jesus told us to pray that God's kingdom would come and that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10) this was not to be only for some far distant future. Nothing else in that prayer is for the far distant future. It is for here and now. Jesus came "preaching and teaching the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23) and he told the Pharisees that "the kingdom has come upon you" since he was driving out demons by the power of the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28). In other words, it was right in front of them if they would dare to embrace it. On the other hand, He also told the Pilate that His kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36). When Jesus returns, we will experience His kingdom in its fullness. But this does not mean we should do nothing now. If we reduce the kingdom to something that only happens in the future, we miss out on what God has for us now. Sometimes I've heard people say, "Why do anything? Everything is just supposed to get worse and worse and then Jesus will return and make it all better." This is certainly not what Jesus told us to do. Jesus, as our example was exhibiting the kingdom *everywhere he went*—just as we should be exhibiting it *everywhere we go*!

Often, we think of activities that express the kingdom being things like preaching, teaching, healing the sick, raising the dead, or driving out demons (Matt. 9:35; 10:8). While these are definitely included, it is not the whole truth. How about what Jesus says in Matthew 25:34-46? In these verses Jesus tells us that those who fed the hungry, gave the thirsty something to drink, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited those in prison are those who will enter into their reward. On the other hand, those who did not care for the needy will enter into eternal punishment. If we consider only preaching, teaching or healing as those activities which are spiritual and worthy of the kingdom of God, we are missing God's will for our lives and our communities.

What would it mean to see God's will in our communities as it is in heaven? It possibly would mean sufficient health care and housing for everyone, enough food in the stomachs of our children, good schools for our children, people trained and prepared to work and job opportunities. It would mean unbroken homes, good relationships within families and neighbors, no physical, sexual or substance abuse and hatreds gone. It would mean people in right relationship with God and bondage to demonic/ancestral spirits broken. The great news is this is what God wants for us! That is why Jesus taught us to pray, "May your kingdom come, your will be done here on earth as it is heaven" (Mt. 6:10). Everywhere we see God's will being done, we see God's kingdom being expressed. This is what we can expect to see in our very own communities *today*. We do not have to wait for Jesus' return. He has already provided the full solution. Let us pray this prayer in faith and expect to see God's kingdom expressed through His will being done *through us* in our communities.

James tells us that if we only listen to the word, but do not do it, we deceive ourselves (James 1:22-25). If we listen to God and hear His word to us about what needs changing in our own worldview, we will be blessed. James also tells us, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James :27). Certainly one way to be polluted by the world is to allow unbiblical worldviews to survive in our hearts and minds. If we want to be changed into the people God intended us to be, we will seek to be redeemed in our thinking. But not only will we allow God to change our thinking, we will seek to do His will. We must take our inward

cleansing, and turn it into an outward service. Where better to start than with the poor in our communities—especially the neglected widows and orphans? It is then we will see changes in our nations, as believers take their place in serving their communities.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Rom. 12:1-3)