

SECTION III

UNLEASH
FAITH

CHAPTER 7

FAITH-SHAPING
DISRUPTIONS

A FALSE ASSUMPTION

One morning I met a young boy of about six years old heading to school. When I wished him a good morning, he muttered a string of vulgar words and then said, “What’s so good about it?”

My heart sank. I couldn’t help but wonder what had shaped someone so young to be so angry. If unchecked, the boy’s anger would lead to a future in jail or death. The brokenness in this young boy broke my heart, and God used it to show me the heart of discipleship.

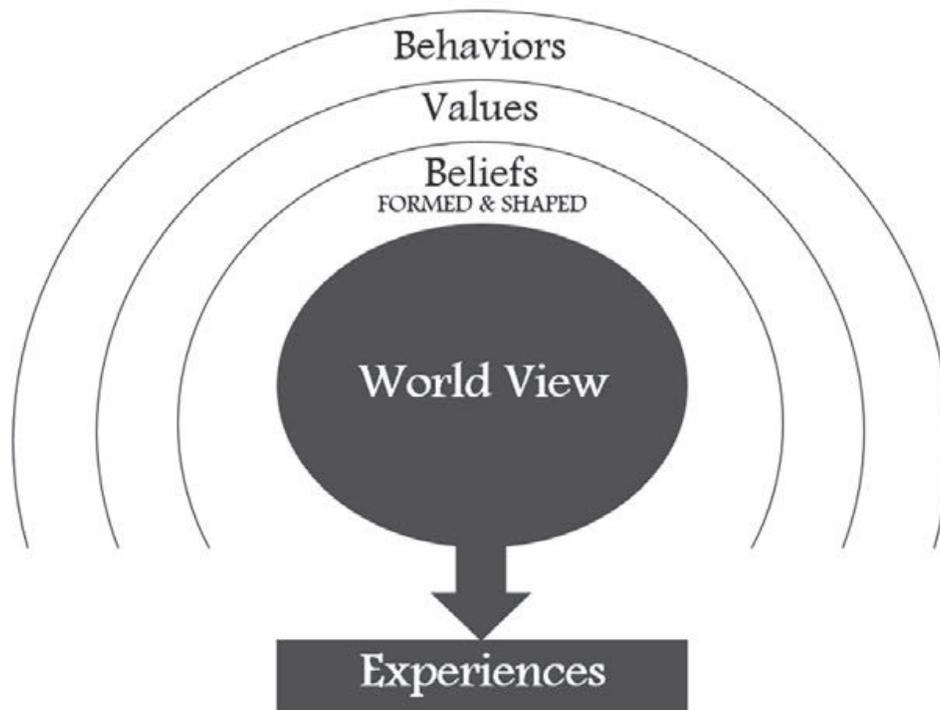
For years, as I worked to develop the faith of my congregation, I assumed that giving people the right information would cause them to believe the right things, and in turn, translate to faith and right behavior. I spent years pouring over the scriptures, preaching, teaching and leading countless Bible studies. The king of information, I was informed and bent on informing others. Focused on developing a personal relationship with God, I thought discipleship meant more worship, deeper prayer and increased Bible knowledge. I completely missed helping our congregation develop a purposeful relationship with God where we loved people far from Christ and shared our faith as we became disciples who were mobilized to make disciples.

The longer I lived in the inner city and the more I experienced the tragedy around me, the more I began to think differently about discipleship. Until I began to interact with my neighbors, I didn’t understand how the daily struggles with fatherlessness, abuse and poverty had formed my neighbors.

MORE FORMED THAN INFORMED

Anthropologists say that our behavior is directly affected by what we value, and those values are influenced by our beliefs. Our beliefs, however, are not *informed* as I had previously thought. Rather, our beliefs come from our worldview which has been predominantly *formed* by years of experiences. In other words, we are more *formed* than *informed*. Even as Christians, God’s word doesn’t shape us until we become doers, not just hearers. As James 1:22 says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (NIV)

We are more *formed* than *informed*.



My son-in-law and oldest daughter are missionaries in Thailand. One day in the thick of Chiang Mai traffic, Ben rushed to help a young man who'd been thrown from his motorcycle. A crowd had gathered, but no one helped. Ben ripped his shirt to use as a tourniquet and yelled for someone to call an ambulance. Again, no one moved. Frustrated, Ben had to make the call himself.

Because Thailand is a Buddhist country, people believe in good and bad karma. According to their beliefs, bad things happen because people with bad karma deserve punishment. Buddhist people don't want bad karma to transfer to them, so no one would get close to the young man and help. Even though Ben *informed* them of the need to help, their Buddhist beliefs *formed* by their daily experiences in a culture which reinforced these values, dictated their behavior.

THE POWER OF EXPERIENCES

As a pastor with a heart to unleash people to become the kind of disciples who live out their calling in practical and powerful ways, this was a huge revelation to me. Our worldview is primarily influenced by our experiences. We can't expect our congregations to be formed into powerful disciples unless we give them *faith-shaping* opportunities in disruption and connections. Faith is a muscle; if we want to grow, we have to exercise.

One of the most difficult transitions for me was *informing people less* and *involving people more*. As Dr. Tim Elmore noted in a blog post on his site, *Growing Leaders*, "shifting from *lecturing* to *facilitating* discoveries is a different mindset, but it's worth the switch. It's less about 'me' delivering and more about 'them' discovering." Dr. Elmore's discovery mirrored mine but transitioning from my dominant *information* process toward an *involvement* process proved hard.¹⁶

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God gave us the Bible to transform us, not simply inform us. His word should give us a *bigger heart*, not a *bigger head*. As James 2:18 says, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds." (NLT)

His word should give us a *bigger heart*, not a *bigger head*.

Just talking about the need is not enough. Listening to a sermon doesn't naturally equate to action. Releasing people outside the walls of the church requires more than an *explanation*; they need an *experience* where brokenness becomes real, and they find themselves carrying the fullness of Jesus to a wounded and hurting world. Using unfamiliar and culturally different environments stretches people and is valuable in producing life-change. Unless we intentionally place ourselves in uncomfortable experiences, we

don't fully rely on God and the power of his Holy Spirit to empower and transform us.

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HOW BROKENNESS SHAPES PASSION AND LEADS TO HUMILITY

Consistently positioning our congregation close to brokenness ignites passion. Why? Because brokenness connects us with God's heart for his people. When we fulfill our calling to be disciples who make disciples wherever they are, we find ourselves face-to-face with broken people. The distance between us and brokenness directly correlates to our passion. The greater the distance, the colder our hearts grow, and the less empathy and passion we have. The smaller the distance between us and brokenness, the more empathy we have, and the more passion compels us to action.

Passion is the fuel behind our faith, propelling us forward when difficulties arise, and we're tempted to quit. Getting next to brokenness helps us confront our own brokenness and enlarges our love and concern for the eternal salvation of others. As Luke 7:47b says, "Whoever has been forgiven little loves little." (NIV) The inverse is also true. Whoever has been forgiven much loves much.

I love what Dr. Brené Brown, author and speaker, says, "... we've divided the world into 'those who need help' and 'those who offer help.' The truth is, we are both."¹⁷

Until we get next to brokenness, we don't recognize our own poverty of soul. Our brokenness allows us to love authentically and connect with others no matter their situation. Brokenness makes us truly human and empowers us to be image bearers of Christ's love.

FAR FROM EASY

Getting next to brokenness is far from easy. Quite honestly, when I started working in the inner city, I wanted to quit. But I knew I couldn't give up because of a conversation I'd had with God on a night I'll never forget.

That night, I turned onto our street an hour before midnight. Flashing police lights made my heart race. Yellow crime tape marked off the house next to ours. A crowd of people blocked my path. An ominous feeling made the hair on my neck prickle.

Our little neighbor girls had been murdered. My legs buckled underneath me. The girls, friends of my daughters, practically lived at our home and regularly attended Bible club with us. Chloe and Care Bear couldn't be gone.

My own doubts surfaced. The staggering problems of crime and gang violence overwhelmed me. I'd had one car stolen and another ruined when gang initiates put sugar in the engine. *Was our work in the inner city worth the cost of putting my family in danger? Could we really make a difference in lives? Should I give up and quit?*

In the quiet before dawn, I sensed God begin to speak. In the midst of my doubt, fear and confusion, I heard Him engage me in a series of questions.

Ron, remember the neighbor woman across the street? The one who looks 60 even though she's 28?

I thought about the young woman with the vacant expression. Hollow eyes met mine whenever I tried to make conversation. Drugs and prostitution had robbed her of her youth.

Can she leave this community?

"Well, no, Lord, she can't."

What about your neighbor who comes knocking on your door asking for his next fix? He's been addicted to drugs for so long, his mind is virtually gone.

I exhaled. This man could barely string together a coherent thought.

Ron, can he leave this community?

“No.” I shook my head, knowing poverty, addiction and circumstances trapped him.

Ron, how about the little girl across the street? You know she’s been molested at least three times. You tried to get the police involved, but they said there wasn’t enough evidence.

My heart ached at the thought of the sweet eight-year-old trapped in the house of her abuse. The injustice made me want to scream.

Can this abused little girl leave this community?

For the third time, my answer was negative.

I felt God look straight into my eyes. *Then, Ron, neither can you.*

No amount of teaching or preaching could shape me with the level of passion that I carry because of this faith-shaping experience.

Today, I have a murder map hanging in my office which reminds me of the people dying around me without hope. Five bullets I keep in my pocket—all found on our property—are a tangible symbol for me to press on to live each day with a sense of urgency to love and reach people far from Christ. With an impassioned heart, I live “sent” as an everyday missionary, sharing hope in the midst of a messy and broken world.

THE POWER OF DISRUPTION

God isn’t asking each of us to move to the inner city, but he is asking each of us to get close to brokenness, so we hurt for what breaks his heart. The real power of brokenness is disruption. Anything that disrupts our daily routines and thought processes positions us for change. Disruption makes us uncomfortable. In our discomfort, we recognize our need for God. Without becoming desperate for God, we have a false sense of control and become self-reliant. Unless we get past ourselves, past our comfort levels, and past the familiar, we will stay in the seats, unchanged and unmoved. That’s one of the reasons God has called his disciples to GO!

Getting out of our routine environments and culture is the key to disruption. We must be confronted with the unfamiliar. For each of us, this looks different. Everyone can experience another reality through disruption. For example, when the rich are confronted by poverty, their hearts break for what breaks God's heart. The same is true on the opposite spectrum. People living in poverty often lose the ability to dream. Going on a college visit or visiting another country opens their world to possibilities.

Why is disruption valuable?

One of the dangers of being a Christian is getting comfortable. Getting outside the walls of the church challenges our natural tendency to stagnate. Without tension, we prefer to stay in our comfortable worlds. However, growth occurs when tension unsettles us from staying in the same place. God is most comfortable when we are uncomfortable because then we must trust and rely on him.

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A FAITH-SHAPING, EXPERIENCE-RICH DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

The tension created by disruption challenges us to change. As leaders, we need to incorporate disruption into our discipleship plan and growth strategy. Instead of thinking in terms of another teaching, sermon or Bible study, we need to think in terms of faith-shaping experiences with tension and disruption. Consistently getting people involved in the inner city, prisons, homeless shelters and other cross-cultural, disruptive and unfamiliar places impassions the heart. People gain a different perspective and the ability to empathize when they consistently interact in these types of disruptive environments. In the middle of the messiness, we become equipped to serve like Jesus and make disciples like he did.

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need to think in terms of experiences with tension and disruption.

Our discipleship plan doesn't need to get better; it needs to get different. Faith-shaping experiences in disruption are the game changer. An experience-rich discipleship plan is not an option for our congregation. As pastors and church leaders, we must create a consistent pathway for our congregation to be stretched through brokenness. Only then will they grow in their dependence on God. Not only must we teach God's word, we must equip our congregation by giving them consistent formational experiences. Practice must follow information.

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Faith is not simply built through prayer, sermons and more Bible studies. Getting out of the seats and into the streets forms powerful disciples who embrace their faith and learn to share the good news with others.