

TUTORIAL
7.5

Word. Identity. Life. Discipleship.

This tutorial gives an introduction to the W.I.L.D. outline in the form of 20 questions - five in each of the areas of Word, Identity, Life and Discipleship. We will look how it can be used, and also reflect on the fact that when we look at how Truth is producing life, growth and fruit in a person or a group of people, we are talking about a process - a journey - not a completed product or destination. We will discuss how W.I.L.D. is a way of describing the primary threads in God's Word that start with His own Being, run through His interactions as Creator with His creation, tie together in the person of Christ, and reach out to the Church.

Last time

We discussed how systems and frameworks could be used to bring clarity to Church building work as long as they are “translucent” enough to allow God's Narrative to show through clearly. The Bible *is enough*, but that does not absolve us from the responsibility of using our minds and every resource that God “sanctifies” and provides us with to be better equipped for His work.

Whether we know it or not, we all have an existing picture of the Church and our part in it, and we are responsible to ask God to show us whether or not that picture is aligned with Truth. We need a clear view of the enormous and complex challenge before us so we can commit fully to the right kind of response.

We also need to consider ways to measure progress in the way God sees it so we don't default to using only tangible factors and shaping our work accordingly. And having terminology and agreed-upon categories helps us talk about the complex challenge.

W.I.L.D. (Word. Identity. Life. Discipleship.)

The W.I.L.D. framework you'll find here is designed to help our understanding of how Truth produces life, growth and fruit. It could be expressed in any number of ways; for example, it could be stated in terms of commitments or vision: “We are committed to giving people access to...” “Our vision is to see

people growing in..." The version below takes the approach of considering each point with a particular person or a group in mind, and so we have put it in the form of questions. There are many implicit ideas embedded in these questions and we have fleshed those out much more fully in the following tutorials in Module 7.

We have tried to introduce the questions in a form that does not immediately limit their application. We have used "they" and "their" so the questions can refer to individuals or groups generally, or to a person or a church more specifically. There is something of a dilemma in doing that though, because an individual believer's growth and fruitfulness is never completely separate from relationships with other believers and particularly with a church that is growing and fruitful. And so even though these questions could pertain to a person or a few individuals who come to faith on their own, there is an inbuilt assumption that they will at some point become part of a local *ecclesia* - a church.

You'll see too that we have purposely used language that describes this as an ongoing process ("Are they learning to..." "Are they increasingly able to...") It is not our intention to present a picture/model of the perfect convert or church, because we know those don't exist. Each individual and body of believers - indeed the whole Body of Christ - is on a journey towards the time when He will bring all things finally into what He intends. So when we are evaluating, defining a vision, or determining directions, what we are looking for are signs that Truth is at work and that things are on a trajectory towards what God intends.

WORD

- Are they able to access the Bible in a form that clearly and faithfully communicates God's revelation to them?
- Are they having God's Word presented to them in a way that allows it to enter and engage their hearts at a worldview level?
- Are they learning to give God's Word its proper place and authority?
- Are they growing in their ability to correctly understand God's Word as His complete Narrative, with Jesus Christ as the heart of the story and its interpretive key?
- Are they increasingly able to make use of God's Word as He intends for His children and His Church?

IDENTITY

- Are they increasingly clear about - and able to articulate - their true identity from God's perspective?
- Are they learning to see their story embedded in the larger Narrative of the Church, stretching back to Pentecost and forward to Christ's return?

- Are they growing in their understanding of the bonds that unite them to the global/local Body under Christ as its Head?
- Are they learning to view others according to truth, and rejecting the divisions, biases and tensions that often define the wider society?
- Are they growing in their understanding of how to appropriately represent the Lord in their current spheres of contact and in others He might lead them to be involved in?

LIFE

- Are they experiencing a deepening relationship with Jesus, learning to depend more completely on Him in different areas of their lives, and gradually seeing their values and behaviour change as a result?
- Are they gaining clarity about the true purpose for which they exist, and are they increasingly able to identify those things that hinder their life in Christ?
- Are they increasingly able to make good decisions based on their understanding of God's local and global purposes, and to use their time, money and other resources accordingly?
- Are they learning to shape the *form* of what they do to serve whatever *function* they are convinced will lead to the *fulfillment* of God's objectives?
- Are they growing in their commitment to reproducing the life they have in Christ, are they equipped with the resources and skills to do so, and are they prioritizing opportunities where there is real need and hunger?

DISCIPLESHIP

- Are they seeing all other ties, loyalties and commitments being increasingly defined by their primary relationship; disciples of their Master, Jesus Christ?
- Are they being helped to apply the general truth from God's Word to their own specific real-life situations?
- Are they able to access regular, godly input and genuine friendships that intentionally help them along as they follow Jesus in the walk of faith?
- Are they being encouraged to function in the areas in which God has gifted and given them abilities so they can develop in their service to Him and His Body?
- Do they have access to defined pathways that offer Bible-based resources, practical instruction and relational discipleship to adequately equip them to serve the church locally and globally?

Why in this order?

The order of the four categories - Word, Identity, Life and Discipleship - has been carefully considered. Even though, as we'll discuss shortly, these areas don't function at all independently in real life, there is still a kind of progression in terms of which is more foundational than the next.

It's obvious that the entrance and engagement of God's Word in the life of an individual or a group is a prerequisite to anything else happening. We will talk about this more in later Module 7 tutorials. Without the communication of truth, and then God's Spirit working with that truth to generate a response, nothing else happens; no faith, growth or fruit can exist. So putting the communication and response to God's Word as our first area we look at to evaluate what is happening with a person, or with a group of people, is a fairly straightforward choice.

But why then do we have *Identity* next? Again, we'll be going further into the whole area of Identity elsewhere, but we see this area as foundational for any growth or fruitfulness in the life of an individual or group. In fact, before life can even begin (i.e. the new birth) someone needs to glimpse who they actually are as they stand before a holy, righteous Creator. Then, real growth happens in our lives only as we begin to understand who God says we now are: new creations, in Christ, His cherished children, members of His Body, etc. And fruit is produced, as we understand who we are in relation to Him and to others.

So what next? *Discipleship* could possibly have come next because it is about the relationships that purposefully encourage growth and fruit. But the area we've called *Life* seems even more foundational, in that it considers the quality and shape the new life is taking, or if it even exists. As we think about ourselves, or someone we are sharing God's Word with, or a small group, or a church, what we hope to see is evidence of true life that God's Spirit is producing through His Word. We're looking for changes and activities that are the natural outflow of life that only *the Life* gives.

Why these particular four areas?

We're not claiming any kind of inspiration for this W.I.L.D. framework. There are other helpful resources that have been developed for evaluating personal Christian development, church planting, church growth, etc., that are useful and well worth looking at. It would have been possible to use different names, more, or less categories, and so on. But after a lot of thought, a number of refinements, and widespread use over a number of years in many contexts, it has proven to be an effective way of talking about the complex and challenging topic of how God's Word produces life, growth and fruit in individuals and communities. And, not without merit, is the fact that WILD forms a nice mnemonic to help us remember it by.

God's essential being

But the real validity of focusing on these four areas doesn't stem from how helpful they are, even though we obviously believe that valid things should have useful applications in the real world. Their real validity comes from the fact that they describe threads that are tied into the self-existence of God:

- God speaks, He communicates truly (*Word*).
- God is a Three-In-One-God, perfect unity in diversity (*Identity*).
- God is completely Alive, He *is* Life (*Life*).
- God loves fully, He *is* Love (*Discipleship*).

The Creator

They also reflect God's relationship as Creator to us, His image bearers, as we see consistently in His Narrative:

- He communicates Truth to us (*Word*).
- He relates to us consistently as Author, Creator, Father, Righteous Judge, Redeemer, etc. (*Identity*).
- He gives us physical life and offers us spiritual life through the new birth (*Life*).
- He loves the world, and has a special love for those He calls His own (*Discipleship*).

The Son

They can be further traced to God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ:

- He is *the Word* who revealed God in the form of a human being. He said, "I am the Truth" (*Word*).
- He is completely God and completely man but without contradiction. He is the Servant King (*Identity*).
- He said "I am the Life", and He showed us how to live out God's life without being corrupted by sin and death (*Life*).
- He is the great Discipler and Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep (*Discipleship*).

The Ecclesia (Church)

And we see the threads continuing on in the way He designed and developed His Body:

- The Spirit who "leads into all Truth" came. Through gifted individuals (prophets/apostles) God completed His revelation. The Church is entrusted with treasuring, safeguarding and sharing His Word (*Word*).

- The Church is called His Temple, His Body, His Bride...and shares an identity for all eternity with Jesus. All believers are made members when they are born again (*Identity*).
- The Church has no life apart from Him. It serves as His physical Body on earth by living out His values, and by being His “hands”, “feet” and “mouth” in the world (*Life*).
- As the Head, He has absolute authority. He sent His Church out to make new disciples and teach them all His Truth (*Discipleship*).



DISCUSSION POINTS

Word. Identity. Life. Discipleship.

1. What is your initial response to the 20 questions in the W.I.L.D. outline above? Are there any that are not clear? Do you think you would benefit from asking these questions about yourself? (Take a moment to go through and replace “they” and “their” with “I” and “my” etc.)
2. Go through those 20 questions and change them into statements that begin with something like, “I want to help people to learn/be able to/experience, etc....” As you describe that kind of contribution, share anything you care to about how well equipped you currently feel to do that and any specific areas that you would like to learn more about or to grow more in.