

Theology Is For Life

Theological training can help equip all of us for a lifetime of discipleship, ministry and leadership, whether we're in formal education, the workplace or in ministry leadership. It can be a through-life endeavour that begins long before any formal seminary education and continues long afterwards. This workshop will provide you with a renewed vision for learning and training, and outlines practical ways to build a formational culture in your church or ministry even when time is short and resources are limited. The workshop is for anyone responsible for overseeing the formation of others, thinking about their own theological education, or those who may be established in ministry but feeling stuck and wondering how to get re-focused and energised with theological study in the midst of their day to day responsibilities.

Jen Charteris, originally from South Africa, is executive director of Crosslands Training, which provides in-context theological training up to PhD level across the UK, Europe, and beyond. Previously she spent over 25 years working in strategic change, organisational consulting, and board and leadership development. She has been a senior advisor on major change programmes in government, defence, infrastructure, and financial services, taught on various MBA programmes and at the UK Military's Defence Academy, worked internationally with the leaders of Christian ministry organisations, and has many years of board experience. She is married to Hugo, a church pastor and planter in the north of England, and they have two adult children.

Daniel Strange is director of Crosslands Forum, a centre for cultural engagement and missional innovation. Formerly he was college director and tutor in culture, religion, and public theology at Oak Hill College, London. Strange is a contributing editor for Themelios, Vice-president of The Southgate Fellowship and a fellow of both the Ezra Institute and the Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics. He is an elder at Hope Community Church, Gateshead, UK, which is part of the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches (FIEC). His book, *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), received an award of merit for theology/ethics in the Christianity Today 2016 Book Awards. His most recent books are *Plugged In* (The Good Book Company, 2019), and *Making Faith Magnetic* (The Good Book Company, 2021).

Intro

Make a list of three or four different people (or types of people) in your ministry context (eg elderly woman, frazzled parents of teens, impressive university student, teens in the youth group).

- How would each of them respond if you told them *'theology is for you'*?
- What would you want to persuade them of?

1. Why: The Gospel Transforms Hearts, Heads and Hands:

Colossians 3

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you

died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory....

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The right kind of learning: knowing and loving God

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man (Lk. 2:52)

*... the end of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him.'*¹ (John Milton)

2. Who: The body of Christ is a diverse community in a hostile world

- Rom 12:1-8 - We need the gifts and flourishing of all believers
- Involving every member in service is not just a way to resource programmes, it's a joyful feature of God's family. How can we engage and equip people when time is scarce or habits are fixed?
- Reflect: How would someone in your congregation - maybe active but not in a formal leadership role - describe the place of training in your church? What language would they use? Who would they say is being equipped? What would they say people are being equipped for? When, where and how would they think people are being equipped?

3. How: Teaching and learning as hospitality

'I have wondered for many years what it might mean to view students not as minds, achievers, customers, or challenges, but as images of God called to faithful living and to love God and neighbor. I have also long been interested in how classrooms might embody the Christian virtue of hospitality' (36).

We should step away from seeing teaching as a set of techniques, as something done to students by a teacher. When we teach, when we design learning, we offer a temporary home in which students will live for a while, and we shape patterns of life together within which they will grow. A pedagogy is a home in which students and teacher can live together for a while, a place to which students are welcomed as guests and in which they can grow. (12).

- David Smith, *On Christian Teaching*

¹ John Milton, 'Of Education', in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 631. Cited in Jeffrey C. Davis and Philip G. Ryken, ed., *Liberal Arts for the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 16.

4a. What: Equipping disciples for life together

Exercise: Creating your map for through-life formation
(see separate handout)

4b. What: Equipping disciples for 'life out there'

The average Christian spends far more time in the workplace or equivalent than serving at church, and it's a minefield! How does formation within the church family equip them to be faithful disciples and godly leaders both in the church and in the world?

“My local church looks at what I do in my day job and just sees useful skills for serving at church. Yet every day at work is a struggle with huge and difficult issues, and the call to read my bible more really doesn't help”

Discuss:

- Apart from being willing to speak of their faith in Christ, what difference should being a believer make to how Christians function in and impact upon their workplaces?
- What struggles, pressures or ethical issues are your church members navigating in their workplaces week by week?
- What sources do they draw on to help navigate or cope with those issues?
- What do you provide or what would you like to be able to provide them?

5. Conclusion

Return to your list of 3-4 people: what conversation would you like to have with each of them, or what action can you take to serve and engage them with learning?

“The biggest theological ideas apply to the most mundane things” - and the most mundane things deserve the biggest theology. Theology is for all of us - for all of life!