

Started in 1295, the city of Plzeň - Czech Republic provides testimony to a religious presence in former centuries but a personal faith in Christ is rare in this 21st century. The city has about 170,000 people. Only around 1% of the population attends a weekly Christian church experience. So it is possible that 99% are not calling Jesus Lord & Savior.

Plzeň 247 is a year-round citywide movement. It involves a network of Christian believers across many churches within the city and others from around the world who desire to be God's ambassadors to the 99% in Plzeň.

2 Corinthians 5: 18 - 20 is the foundation for this movement because the Biblical words specifically point people to the God given ministry of reconciliation. There are many ways for Christians to have a ministry of reconciliation. Plzeň 247 is specifically focused on reconciliation to the city's 99% through prayer & worship.

What does it mean to have a ministry of reconciliation through prayer for the 99% of Plzeň? How should you think about it? What should you do about it?

This is one part of a four part series on having a ministry of reconciliation through prayer for your city. Three of the speakers are different pastors from the city of Plzeň, Czech Republic. The fourth is a pastor from the West Indies island of Grenada who leads his denomination to pray for the 99% of Plzeň.

Since this actual talk was presented in Czech, this is the written English version followed by reflection questions that are suitable for individual or group study.



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I would like to start with the passage from 2 Corinthians chapter 5 that could be called "To see others through the eyes of reconciliation." Verse 16 states "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer."

I don't know how often it happens to you, where you make a very fast judgment out of a superficial observation. To be honest with you, I did it today on my way to this seminar. I was standing at the bus stop and there was a man standing there who was about 60 years old. This man was wearing really old shorts, T-shirt, baseball hat and plimsoll shoes. He had an earring in his ear. He also had on his leg a cobra tattoo. Immediately I had a thought that he looked ridiculous. This was the very first thought that came to my mind. He is sixty years and he looks ridiculous in trying to look like a teenager.

But then I get another thought. I am on my way to preach about this topic of reconciliation and here I am caught up in my own superficial view on others. After that realization, I started to think about him. What's his name? Does he have any kids or grandchildren? What does his life look like? I was moving my thoughts from the very superficial things to a deeper level. Then I started to laugh to myself because this story has now become the background behind my workshop introduction to you.

From my point of view it happens very often. That is we are judging someone very fast and this also happens by Christians too. I can imagine that this experience of judging others in a fast way might lead Christians to conclude that the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:16 can't be attained. *"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, a new creation has come; the old has gone, the new is here!"*

So from now on, we should regard no one from a worldly point of view. I think Paul is not speaking just about some unreachable goal. Sometimes we think that it is just something large, something we cannot reach, but it's not that. Paul is speaking about the reality of spiritual influence on someone who has found a relationship with Christ. Man is not his own any more but is now the person who has found a relationship with Jesus. Paul speaks about this as a gift that Christians get once and forever through faith from God. You can view it in a new way. It's a gift which all people that accept Christ will receive.

We can try to change Paul's words a bit, saying from now on we are not forced to regard anyone from the worldly point of view. But it's not that we are not judging others anymore but rather that we are not forced to do it. I think there is this message found in those words. We are still judging because we are looking just on the visible things. We can still see that old man with the tattoo and earrings in his ear. However what we need is to not look on others through our imperfect human measurements.

So how can we see others through the eyes of reconciliation? Maybe some of you can share or give us some instant advice. I will share what I have received when I was praying for it.

The very first thing that we have to do is to be open to our new life in Christ. It sounds really spiritual to receive our new life in Christ, to acknowledge that we are a new creation and that we now see others in a deeper way. We have to acknowledge that we can now see more. That we can see others through a heart filled with love, the same as the love that God has for all people. We have to remember that the love that God has for us is the same love he has for the other person. He loves your neighbor, your aunt, your cousin and more. He loves even all those people who did not find Christ yet with that same love. We can see more in other people based upon God's love.

Paul knew that in non-believers there is a spirit which affronts God and that is a spiritual obstacle for them. God renewed and he is still renewing our humanity. This is a fact that I would now like to speak to. That he renewed and is still renewing. He has created us in a new

way and that he is still doing it. We can say that we are still just heading through life. That we will be heading through it until the end of our lives. We have to know that we are not perfect. Once we will be made perfect, but while we are in our physical body we will be limited by our humanity and imperfectness.

Jesus knew it also. When he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, he told his disciples to be awake and not to fall into temptation. Can you remember what the next thing was he said to them? He said your spirit is ready but the body is weak. I like to say, the body was, is and will always be weak. Without vigilance in prayers, we are easy to fall in temptation, even to the temptations of superficial judgments. To see people only in a superficial way, just in the way we see them with our eyes.

We can say that the prayers for reconciliation and for preaching the gospel are necessary to see others through the eyes of Jesus. To see other people through the eyes of reconciliation. Without prayer it's impossible. Maybe when you will meet some likeable person it's easy to say, yeah he is loved by God for sure. Crazy. It's not possible without intercessions.

In Christ we can see people in a new way. This is what Paul says. We can see them in a different new way and what do I hear in his message is it's not something automatically that we can see others in a different way. He is prompting us to look at others in a new way through the eyes of reconciliation. He is prompting us to intercede for others and that this is the way of letting God's spirit work in us through his love. God's spirit is overwhelming us with his love when we pray for others and he is awakening the interests for others within us.

This is how it's happens. This is also what Jesus spoke about in the synagogue in Nazareth, when he came there after a while and they gave him the book of Isaiah. He found words there which you know for sure (Luke 4:18). *"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."* You should highlight *"good news to the poor"*. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

In that time it was always so, that all eyes were fixed on the person that read the scripture because the people then would wait for the speaker's interpretation of the words. They are thinking "Go on preacher, we are waiting for your words". So Jesus started to speak and he said only these words: *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

Here is the One who is anointed by the Spirit, who knows who has sent him and what his goal is. These words touched me again in a mighty way. Those are the words of the Messiah, who has been filled with the spirit and of the Messiah who knows exactly to whom he is bringing the good news of the gospel. He perceived the situation of the people to whom he had

been sent, the blind, captured, and oppressed. He saw the reality of their lives. He could see it, he was looking through the eyes that we are missing so many times.

When Jesus was dealing with people we can see always his real interests in their lives. And I don't know what about you, but I fell in love in Him through this. When I read the Gospel and I see the way he comes to a person. How he is dealing with each one personally. That he was able to perceive a person's needs. He always saw lost sons and daughters. All the people who others reject, He always saw them as lost children of God. He was always standing nearby them. It started with his baptism, he was standing next to them as he entered the same river with them. He was standing there next to all the sinners. He let himself be baptized there with them. He was not staring at them thinking what a lost person you are, thank God that I came. This is Jesus from Nazareth, this is our Lord, this is the Messiah of Israel.

I already read from the book of Luke and I will read some more from his book. Evangelist Luke is describing a story of Jesus, when he met a tax collector (Luke 19). Most of the people despised this tax collector. When Jesus saw him up in the branches of the tree, he called him by his name: *"Zacchaeus, come down quickly, because I have to stay at your home."* Jesus saw something more than a tax collector and despised person. He was rejoicing when he saw Zacchaeus on that tree and called him by his name. Wow, he called him by his name. Jesus always sees the person, so we should see the person also. This Christ is among us and we can see in the same way as he does. We can see another person without fast judgment.

I don't know if you know Dietrich Bonhoeffer. You cannot know him personally because he is not alive any more. But you may know his theological message. For me personally, he is one of the most amazing theologians of the last century. He was a part of the German proclaiming church at the time of Adolf Hitler. He was one of those few people that didn't bow down before Nazis'. We know that he was killed at the end of the war on the direct order of Himmler. He was a disciple of the truth. He was teaching and preaching unlike many people before him. I am still learning many thoughts from his teaching and from his book *"Following"*.

I will read a few passages from his book. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, during teaching about the disciples and their relationship to non believers (preaching on the mountain) Matthew 7:1-12 says these words. The disciple is watching over other persons like over someone to whom Jesus comes. I am watching over the person, I am a disciple, so I see that Jesus is coming to him. This is the way how disciples should watch. This is the goal to watch in this way.

To be honest with you, today in the morning I wasn't a disciple at the very beginning, but then I turned into one. This is the way how the disciple is watching. For the disciple there is never ever just a meeting of two people. It's never me and the other person because Jesus is always coming as well. To judge another person in a fast superficially way means to think of that person in forbidden way. Because this way of condemnation will always bring blindness. If I judge the other person, I am blind because of what is evil inside of me and I am also blind from the grace that is here for the other person. I cannot see my evilness and at the same moment I cannot see the grace from the Lord that is here for the other one.

There is no other way toward the other person than through a prayer to God. We should carve this sentence that there is no other way to our neighbors except through prayer to the Lord. There is no other way. We are trying to find other ways. We are trying many things but if there is not a prayer, there cannot be a meeting of two people where they change their thoughts.

Judgment and forgiveness are in the hands of the Lord. This is what Bonhoeffer pulls out from the preaching on the mountain. Judgment and the forgiveness is in the hand of the Lord, he is the one who is closing and opening doors, and the disciple therefore should pray, seek and knock.

When disciples carry the concern about not caring about others, it should bring them to prayer. Promises which are given to their prayers, says Bonhoeffer, are the highest power that has been given to the disciples. Let's keep in mind this promise and let's follow it. Therefore let's ask that it might be given to us. Let's search to find. Let's knock that it can be opened to us. These are the challenges from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This is what belongs to us. This is the mighty promise and the rest is in God's hands.

I would like to ask you, you have an idea to pray for, don't you? You should pray for each person you meet. Maybe for the person that you are meeting with regularly. Again, again and again. It includes all the people that are not likeable to you. Pray for each person that the Holy Spirit will put them into your heart. People that he is reminding you about.

Right now I am speaking to myself also, because I keep forgetting sometimes. Many times I have people in front of me and I just say hello or good morning and that's all I do. Real prayer is to make a space for God. I like this definition. To make a space for God, for the God who is salvation, full of love, the God who is searching for the lost people. To make a space for the God who wants to stay and live in our lives and through us into the lives of others.

Someone said that prayer is the way to enter the holy of holies, which is hidden deep inside each of us. And I don't have to come alone. I can bring others to that place, along with their needs and problems. This is what I can do. And when it happens I am finding out that this is a place where I can align with them and this is the place where it all begins.

God Himself is doing something mighty inside of me. He is touching the whole world through me. All humanity immediately points to the kindness of Christ. They are experiencing the power of intercessory prayer. When he or she is praying for another person, he or she starts to see the other person with brand new eyes, because it's not possible without it.

Let's summarize it. We should lay down our prejudices and start to see others differently. This is what is changing my relationship to others, because I have a new hope for other people. It's not my own hope but a hope from God himself.

I am starting to see new possibilities which I did not see before. And maybe out of this there will come something to say or something to do. This is what the Holy Spirit is giving us. We cannot find it without prayer. Because right prayer leads us to a deep meeting with God.

I've read something from Mother Theresa who does some kind of tabernacle. Everywhere where her gracious sisters are located, they have a tabernacle. Each morning they are waking up very early to start their day with adoration which means worshipping the Lord. They are celebrating the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper. They are feeding themselves spiritually for two hours each day. They started by doing this once a week and then they changed it to a daily basis. This is how their days begins, by going to the streets into the middle of the very poorest people. This is the way how they can see something in a different way.

I was thinking how much of that I am missing of the things that these sisters know about. Mother Theresa said that without prayer, that love would never be real love but just a kind of philanthropy. That is the reality. Let's pray for others that we can see them through the eyes of reconciliation.

My last thought is whenever you recognize your superficial judgment about someone else, repent to the Lord and offer thanks to the Holy Spirit because he gave you the eyes of reconciliation. Also say thanks to the Lord for everything that he has done for that other person, because you know what Jesus did. Pray for others even in tongues if we have this gift and listen to what the Lord says. This is my encouragement for your eyes of faith, eyes of reconciliation, the eyes of Christ, because we are a new creation. AMEN

Reflection Questions

1. This talk used the beginning story about the older man who looked ridiculous because he dressed like a teenager to point to the concept of judgment. Actually many academic researchers have identified that for all people, the human instinct is that judgment often comes before understanding. Now think about that ridiculous person in your own life, at home, at work, or wherever. How are you judging that ridiculous person in your mind? Now consider the words of Philippians 4:8. How does your opinion of that ridiculous person change when you try to describe that person only using the qualities listed within Philippians 4:8?

Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”	What is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy about that ridiculous person in your life?
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2. A possible way to describe how people experience love is that everybody loves someone but that no one person loves everybody. However this discussion had you focus on the idea that God’s love is not like that. That is, “the love that God has for you is the same love he has for the other person”, even when that other person is not a believer in God. How does the description of God’s love influence your thinking about the 99% of Plzeň?
3. A point was made that when Jesus was dealing with people, we can see always his real interests in their lives. That he was able to perceive a person’s needs. He always saw them as lost children of God. He was always standing nearby them. So how many of the 99% of Plzeň do you intentionally try to stand close to?
4. Pastor Pavel makes a deep observation about brokenness. He said “I cannot see my own evilness and at the same moment I cannot see the grace from the Lord that is there for the other person. There is no other way to reconcile the differences between me and other people except through praying to God.” So conclude this reflection time by praying for what you cannot see about yourself and others, and asking God to reconcile the differences between you and other individuals. Now pray in the same way for the differences that exists between the 1% and the 99% of Plzeň.