

The Belief Tree

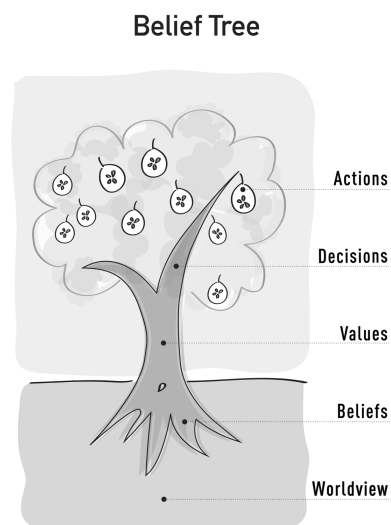
by Darlene Cunningham with Dawn Gauslin

Jesus' strategy to evangelize the world was to multiply Himself into His disciples, who would reproduce men and women of like vision and values, who would multiply disciples, and so on (2 Tim 2:2). The goal was and is to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15), to disciple all the nations (Matthew 28:19) and to produce fruit that will remain (John 15:16). This is the call of Youth With A Mission and University of the Nations, and should be the goal of every disciple.

How is good and lasting fruit produced? How do we reproduce in others the vision and values God has given to YWAM? It is not enough to be well organized and pass on information: we need to have ingested the foundational beliefs of the faith and the values of the Mission in order to pass them on to successive waves of learners. If this is not done, we will only copy a model and we will never be able to answer the "why" questions.

We need to know what we *do* believe and why; and we need to know what we do *not* believe and why.

The Bible uses many illustrations of trees, soil, vines, pruning, fruit, leaves and seeds to speak to us about our lives, ministry and fruitfulness. I first heard the analogy of the "Belief Tree" from Darrow Miller, of Disciple Nations Alliance, who speaks on Biblical Christian worldview. He teaches that "ideas have consequences" – that there is a direct link between roots and fruit; what we believe and how we behave. I have since developed the illustration and use it as a foundation for nearly everything I teach. This simple illustration can provide a reference point – a measuring rod – for making decisions and evaluating the fruit of your ministry both individually and corporately. I trust that God will use it to bring insight and impart life to you in such a deep way that it becomes a part of your "toolbox" as well.



As you consider a tree, the soil represents our worldview; the roots represent our foundational beliefs; the trunk represents our values; the branches represent our decisions; the fruit represents our actions. The seeds represent the genetic code for reproducing life. And of course, the DNA of that First Seed was/is Jesus Himself, living in us! In order for there to be cycles of healthy life, the DNA must flow from the roots, through the trunk, along the branches and into the fruit ... the seeds in the fruit start the process all over again.

SOIL = WORLDVIEW

One of the first things it is important to identify about ourselves and/or others is, "What is the environmental worldview that I was raised in....and what is the worldview of those I'm relating to?" Even though you may have come to Christ through the work of the cross, what is the background that has influenced your family, your culture and your

thinking - even in subtle ways? This is the soil in which your "tree" grows. Is it Animistic? ... Hindu? ... Muslim? ... secular humanism? This will affect the glasses through which you see everything. Much of the Western world has a Judeo-Christian background, but it has declined into a worldview of secular humanism: "It's all about me. If it feels good, do it. Truth is relative - it's whatever I think is right for me." Even in the way we present the Gospel, it is important that we do not feed this lie. We value the individual, but we don't worship the individual! It's all about Jesus!!

Often the errors in the worldview in which we have been raised need to be transformed to align with a Biblical Christian worldview, which then forms the taproot of our beliefs. The first four foundational truths below describe the shared presuppositions of all the Biblical writers. In YWAM we learned of this Biblical framework from Dr. Francis Schaeffer, founder of L'Abri. We have added a fifth presupposition that affirms the purpose of mission for which God has created us:

1) GOD IS INFINITE AND PERSONAL. He is absolutely limitless and cannot be measured; He is uncreated and has no beginning or ending. And He is a personal/relational being with an intellect, will and emotions. Only the God of the Bible is both infinite and personal.

2) MEN AND WOMEN ARE FINITE AND PERSONAL. We are made in God's image as personal beings (with intellect, will and emotions), created for relationship with Him and others. But we are finite - we have a beginning point and definable limits.

3) TRUTH IS CONSTANT AND KNOWABLE. Truth doesn't change; it is absolute. And we can know truth ("You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" John 8:32).

4) CHOICES ARE SIGNIFICANT AND HAVE CONSEQUENCES. The consequences of our good/right/wise decisions lead to rewards and life; the consequences of our bad/wrong/sinful decisions lead to punishment and death.

5) WE ARE CALLED TO BE CHANGE-MAKERS WITH GOD. God is a missionary God, his Son is a missionary Messiah, his Spirit is a missionary Advocate, and his Word is a missionary Book.

ROOTS = BELIEFS The roots to the tree are our basic beliefs, which must grow out of the truth of God's Word or our tree can't bear good fruit. All of our beliefs must be rooted in the Scripture.

Other elements of our basic root system include things like believing the truth about GOD'S NATURE (the essence of who He is: all powerful, all knowing, all present, etc.) and HIS CHARACTER (how He chooses to express His nature: He is loving, kind, just, holy, merciful, etc.) Of course, we could spend volumes and eternity describing these foundational roots, because there is no end to the vastness and wonderfulness of our great God! But these are some of the most basic things we must learn from the Word and teach to those we disciple, in order to develop deep roots that can nourish their lives and influence every decision.

All of our YWAM Discipleship Training Schools should spend a major amount of time teaching and wrestling with the root system of our basic beliefs. The curriculum defined

by the International DTS Centre and approved by the YWAM Global Leadership Forum gives excellent guidelines to follow in building strong roots (www.ywamdtscentre.com).

When we truly know God ... when we learn how to hear His voice through time spent in relationship with Him ... when we understand that because He loves us, His will is always the highest and best for us, for others, for Himself and for the universe, we will spend far less time in the syndrome of "I should have ... could have ... would have" We are more settled in knowing that His will is always good and His grace is always sufficient.

TRUNK = VALUES

In Youth With A Mission, we place a strong emphasis on our "Foundational Values." I am the one^[1]_{SEP} who began the process of identifying and writing down these values so that we could pass them on to successive generations of YWAMers for continued fruitfulness. I have come to realize that the values on their own pre-suppose that everyone has the same worldview and foundational belief system, which they do not. That is why, in recent years, I've begun teaching the "Belief Tree" – because our values grow out of and clarify our underlying beliefs. Just as a tree doesn't begin with the trunk at ground level, our values are not the starting point. The starting point for producing fruit that remains is first the seed of Jesus planted in our lives, aligning our worldview with a Biblical Christian worldview, and then the root system revealed throughout the Bible: Who is God? Who is man? What is truth? etc. For example, Foundational Value #14 states: "YWAM is called to value each individual" Why? Because God is a personal God, who created mankind in His image, as personal beings, so that we could live together with Him in a relationship of love. We are to value what God values.

BRANCHES = DECISIONS

The limbs of the tree represent the principles by which we make decisions, whether personal or corporate. Again, our decisions must grow out of and reflect our values or they lack strength. Jill Garrett, who introduced the *Strengthsfinders* assessment tool to YWAM, uses the architectural definition of the word "integrity" to illustrate the need for consistency between our purpose, vision, beliefs, values, decisions and actions. All must be in line with each other and with the word of the Lord in order for the structure to be sound and have "integrity."

Have you ever been in a situation where a policy (i.e., a corporate decision) was implemented that just didn't "set right"? Usually, it is because it is not consistent with what we say we value. Our decisions and actions should be born out of our beliefs and values: they should be the seamless extension of them. When a practice is established, there should be a response in our spirits that says, "Well, of course! If we believe and value *this*, then the automatic fruit of our decisions should be *that!*"

Let me give you a really practical example: there was a situation once at a campus where I was the operations leader. While I was away on a trip one time^[1]_{SEP} an experienced older person was put in charge of the transportation department. When I returned home from my trip, I discovered that a new policy had been established regarding drivers of YWAM vehicles: no one under 25 years of age was allowed to drive the YWAM vans!^[1]_{SEP} I thought "oh, we must have changed insurance companies, and they have set this rigid requirement" so I set out to find the reason for this new rule, because it seemed very

restrictive. When I asked, "Why do we have this new restriction? Has the government made a new rule? Or have we changed insurance companies?" I discovered that it was neither: the transportation manager was of the opinion that young people tended to be more careless and irresponsible than older drivers and decided to set the age limit higher!

God called us to be YOUTH With A Mission! Our sixth Foundational Values states: "YWAM is called to champion youth." We can't challenge young men and women to go into difficult and dangerous places, and possibly even lay down their lives for the Gospel, and then tell them we don't trust them to drive the vans! It would be okay to have a requirement for all potential drivers to pass a driver's test based on skills, but it is not okay to have an automatic judgment that "youth are irresponsible."

Think about it: if decisions have been enacted^[SEP] at your campus or in your school that do not reflect who God is, or what He has called us to value, then guess which things needs to change?! I am constantly in this evaluation process myself, and have faithful friends who challenge me with questions like: "Darlene, how does this or that decision reflect the justice of God and our call^[SEP] to be international?" God has called us as a Mission to a season of "re-alignment" – we need to be diligent to see that there is consistency between our beliefs, values, decisions and actions. This needs to be continuously evaluated.

We have made a "policy" – a corporate leadership decision – in the University of the Nations that we^[SEP] are required to have at least three hours of intercessory prayer per week in all of our courses. Why? If this is just^[SEP] a "rule" which is disconnected from our values and beliefs, then prayer can become a totally lifeless dead work. Buddhists pray. Hindus pray. Muslims pray five times a day! But they are not praying to the true God. Because of our root belief that God is both personal and infinite, we value prayer as the avenue of two-way communication with this God who hears and cares and has the power to act. Not only that, but He designed us to be co-creators with Him through prayer! He chooses to involve us in releasing His will "on earth as it is in heaven" through praying the things on His heart. It will transform our prayer lives when we really grasp this and make ourselves available to hear from God like we believe He wants to create with us in prayer!

FRUIT = ACTIONS

The fruit is the outward expression of the life of the tree. On an individual basis, it is our actions and behavior; on a corporate level, it is our programs and practices. In a healthy tree, the roots draw in life-giving nourishment that flows through the trunk and the branches resulting in the production of good fruit. That's what we want for our lives and our ministries: good fruit that remains.

The amazing thing about fruit is, it has seeds inside! The seeds carry the DNA – the essential genetic data that will reproduce future generations of healthy, fruitful trees. Every successive season, there is new fruit, and though each fruit is unique, it carries the same DNA and will reproduce the same kind of tree as the one that it came from. You've probably heard it asked, "You can count the number of seeds in an apple, but can you count the number of apples in a seed?"

Programs like the Discipleship Training School are “fruits” of our ministry tree that should reflect our beliefs, values and principles. Every DTS around the world can and should look different from the others – just as every apple is an apple but each one is unique, because the people God brings will be different and the needs will be different. We must continuously evaluate our methods and models as well, to be sure that they support the new life and growth. God wants to give a fresh infusion of His Spirit and creativity into each school, but they should all carry the DNA – the genetic code – of a DTS and of YWAM.

Oftentimes people look at a program such as the DTS and want to replicate it. But it doesn’t work when it is disconnected from the YWAM “tree” from which it grew. Another ministry or a church may draw elements from a YWAM DTS or run a similar discipleship program which may be very effective. Though the basic Bible beliefs are similar, the values for every organization are different, and their programs should grow out of and reflect the unique characteristics of the things God has called them to embrace.

As mentioned earlier, “integrity” is when our worldview, beliefs, values, decisions and actions flow seamlessly, with no “disconnect.” Our actions and behavior should clearly align with what we say we believe. When this isn’t happening, there is a “break” in the flow.

Here is another personal story that illustrates this point so clearly: As is our custom, one night Loren and I were hosting a large group of YWAMers for a meal at our home. Afterward, a number of people offered to help me clean up. One young leader, holding an armload of aluminum soda cans, asked “Darlene, do you recycle?” I replied, “I believe in it, but I don’t do it.” When I heard the words come out of my mouth, I was so shocked that I gasped out loud. I had been teaching on the Belief Tree to that very group of people! I asked the helper, “Did you hear what I just said? I said that I *BELIEVE* it, but I don’t *DO* it!” It’s true that in Hawaii, recycling is not required by law, and they don’t make it easy to accomplish, as recycle systems are not in place. But I went out the next day and bought recycle bins for aluminum cans, plastic bottles and glass and I have recycled from that day to this.

The Purpose of Pruning

In John 15 we read a key passage about the relationship between pruning and fruitfulness. Jesus says “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.” He also says in Matthew 7 “You will recognize them [false prophets] by their fruit A good tree produces good fruit and a bad tree produces bad fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.” Romans 11:16b reconfirms this seamless connection “... if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too.”

So if a tree produces **no** fruit, God cuts off the branches; if a tree produces **good** fruit, He prunes it to produce more fruitfulness; and if a tree produces **bad** fruit, He totally uproots it and destroys it, because it has grown out of false beliefs.

God's purpose for us is love and fruitfulness. He prunes us to produce **more** fruit and **better** fruit. If we realize that we have become unfruitful, a good question to ask may be "have I somehow gone astray from godly beliefs and values?"

My friend and co-worker, David Hamilton, has added another dimension to this Belief Tree teaching which will help you in using this as a very practical tool in your life:

WORLDVIEW = what is REAL

This is our un-thought-through presuppositions about reality. It's what we generally accept or believe from our environment or the way we were raised, without questioning.

BELIEFS = what is TRUE

You may ask, "But aren't what is real and what is true the same?" Yes, if there is integrity; but if there is not integrity, what seems real to us and what is actually true may be very different. (Remember the foundational truths of Christianity outlined above: there is absolute truth, and it is constant and knowable.)

For example, in Africa some tribal people are animistic, so what is REAL for them is that they believe spirits exist in different forms of nature – rocks, the sea, lions, etc. According to their worldview, if you get sick it's because someone has put a curse on you. When an animist becomes a Christian and believes that Jesus is the Son of God, they believe this is TRUE. When they become sick, they know Jesus can heal them because He is powerful. But if they pray to Jesus and don't get well, they often quickly revert to the reality that they have known, which is that sickness is caused by evil spirits. So they may go back to the witch doctor to remove the curse.

This syncretism (mixture of opposing belief systems) works against integrity. Every culture and every individual has issues of syncretism. Identifying and ridding ourselves of it occurs as we mature in integrity.

VALUES = what is GOOD

Isn't truth good? Yes, it should also be considered good. Why is this different? When you embrace something as good, it's something you do because you like it – you find it desirable or beneficial. There is some internal delight.

When you read through the 18 YWAM values, you might read one and think "I've got to achieve this" or "I need to work on this one" This is an indicator that you see this as a principle or truth that is right, but you have not yet learned to really love it. As long as it's something external that you have to live up to, rather than something internal that you delight in, then it has not yet become a personal value.

PRINCIPLE-BASED DECISIONS / POLICIES = what we think is RIGHT

Once you have embraced something true and attributed value to it, it will lead to right decisions and policies. Just living by the rules and doing what is right is not discipleship! What we want to see as a result of true discipleship is internal government! This is one of

the most important things in the world – to be self-governed, have self-morality, and lead ourselves based on God’s principles, not on external boundaries.

ACTIONS / PROGRAMS = what is WISE

If all these others things are aligned, our behavior/actions will be wise.

We need to learn to make decisions that bring harmony between what is real and true and right and good and wise. Only then are we walking in integrity! How do we discover whether there is seamless integrity or disconnections? By asking questions...

There are two questions that will lead you to insights at every level of the Belief Tree:

1. “WHY?” This is a discovery question that leads us to foundations/presuppositions.

Let’s look again at the example Darlene shared about young people not being allowed to drive YWAM vehicles, and use the question “Why?” to lead us from the action back down to the pre- suppositional worldview.

ACTION: young people can’t drive YWAM vans.

Why? Because of a faulty POLICY.

Why was the policy wrong? Because it did not reflect that we VALUE young people.

Why should we value young people?

Because our BELIEF about God, based on His Word, tells us that He values young people: Jeremiah, Mary, Timothy, David, Samuel, Daniel, Joseph ... all of the disciples. Our Biblical Christian worldview tells us that we are made in the image of God from birth, not just from the age of 25!

When you get down to the “belief” part, you should always have a “God said in His Word” upon which to base your belief.

It is so important to ask the WHY question. You cannot get understanding and make wise decisions without this. When people don’t understand beliefs and values, they just copy a model, and the life soon goes out of it – it becomes dead works.

You can also do the opposite – move from the roots to the fruit by asking the question:

2. “SO WHAT?” This question leads us to understand implications/applications.

WORLDVIEW – we are made in image of creator God.

So what? We BELIEVE we can co-create with Him.

So what? We VALUE prayer as a good thing – it changes things!

So what? We make PRINCIPLE-BASED DECISIONS: I will give up whatever it takes to have time for prayer: sleep, food, social activities.

So what? My ACTIONS line up: I establish a lifestyle of prayer.

The reason a lot of Christians fail is because they go straight from understanding something to be TRUE to doing something because it is RIGHT. They skip the step of VALUE and it becoming GOOD and delightful. It's not hard for me to do what I embrace as good and delightful. But if I only try to do something because I know it is RIGHT, I will fail much more easily.

As you keep asking the Holy Spirit to examine your life and reveal any place where there is a lack of integrity, you can invite God to transform your mind and thinking^[L]_[SEP]so that you will grow in maturity and greater likeness to Christ!

SUMMARY:

We must know WHY we believe WHAT we believe. Our actions should be a reflection of our beliefs, values and principle-based decisions. We should be able to give an answer when asked, "Why do you do what you do, the way you do it?" It is an opportunity to share our beliefs, values and principles. And if we don't have an answer or we don't know why, it is an opportunity to seek answers and make sure that our actions and the fruit of our lives and ministries are a true reflection of Jesus.

I love the story of one family – a husband, wife and two teenage kids – who came to do a DTS at YWAM/UofN Kona and heard me teach on the Belief Tree. They were fairly new Christians and the husband was a very successful businessman. I'm sure he had sat through tens of courses on decision-making, but the Spirit of God had a profound impact on him and the whole family through understanding the Belief Tree. It gave them a simple yet practical framework for making decisions and evaluating whether their lives were in alignment with their beliefs. When they returned home after DTS, the family spent most of a two-week vacation to Ireland working on their family Belief Tree, defining their beliefs, values, principles for making decisions and actions. They drew it on large piece of poster board, and upon returning home, they hung it on the kitchen wall. It is there, in the busiest room of the house, that they gather^[L]_[SEP]to make family decisions, evaluate where they have come from and where they're going. It is there that they also have that occasional discussion regarding outward behavior that may or may not match what they say they believe – not only the children's behavior, but the parents have invited the children to hold them accountable to live what they say they believe. What a wonderful and simple yet profound tool for checking the "integrity" of our lives and ministries!

Scriptures for additional meditation/study:

Psalms 1:1-3; Colossians 2:6-7; Matthew 7:15-23; Matthew 13:1-9; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Isaiah 61:3,11; John 15:1-17; Colossians 2 & 3; Romans 11:16.

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