



**G**eneralizing

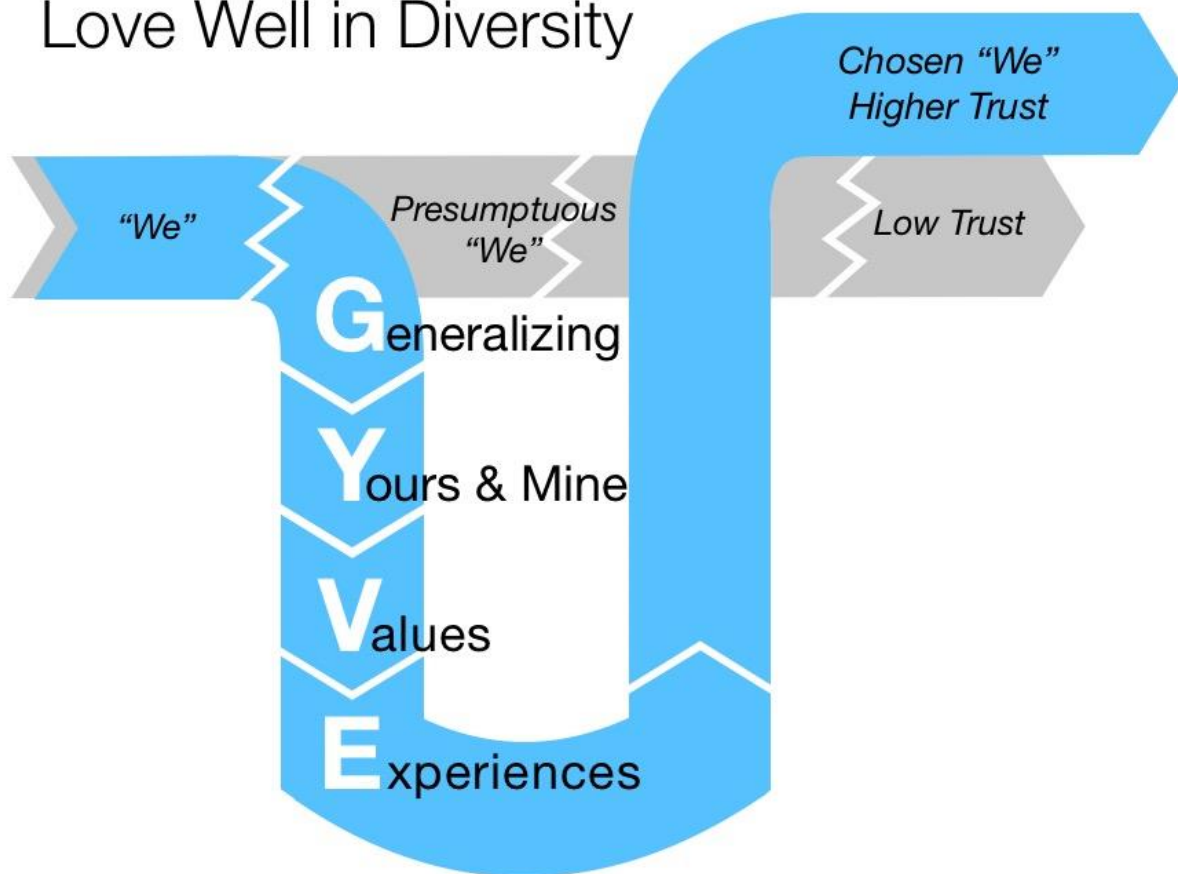
**Y**ours & mine

**V**alues

**E**xperiences

How to love well in an age  
of diversity

## GYVE: How to Love Well in Diversity



In 2017 we explored what it looks like to love well. We used the acronym GYVE (explained below) as one tested way to do this. We also explored how Jesus modelled this movement for us throughout his ministry. This is all part of our "Fixed on Jesus" series which has been framed by the saying:

*"In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."*

GYVE is our model for doing the third part of that saying, "in all things, charity". In the New Year we're going to do this together with our **top three "Hot Button topics"** – three "non-essentials". Before then, we must understand the ground rules. GYVE is our attempt at that.

# Generalizing

“We.” It’s a simple word, apparently. When you can use it authentically, it means there is honest agreement. We need... we feel... we think, a sameness of circumstances, emotions and beliefs. There is a pleasantness to be able to say it and know that there is true unity. So pleasant, in fact, that even when it’s no longer true, we’re tempted to want to keep thinking of ourselves as a “we” anyways, and don’t talk about the differences. If we keep on using “we” language then, we no longer use it authentically, we use it presumptuously.

Those moments come when people become too complicated to fit inside that simple word. For those of us who thrive on a sense of togetherness, this can be terrifying. Even for those of us that don’t mind some conflict, it’s hard work to name the new realities, identifying and speaking out about the ways we’ve grown different. Despite the fact that differences can be either neutral, a result of compromise, or from increasing maturity, they can give us the same dread. And it’s never certain whether or not these differences will dramatically affect the way the group has been. Unspoken questions lurk in our minds:

*“Will they be able to love me if I disagree with them? Will they try to control and change me, maybe with great pressure? What about our ability to work together closely for a common purpose?”*

Differences are not in themselves bad, but many of us do not have positive memories of differences bringing anything good when they surface. Memories of conflict that brought devastation shout inside us, “don’t do that again!” Some of us have felt abandoned when our parents or leaders in the past couldn’t resolve their differences. Much has been lost by conflict that surfaced and never resolved, and the grief of these things remains in some of us. Sometimes, too, leaders see the potential of loss of momentum that disagreement has

often produced, and they can be reluctant to pay the cost of honesty.

## **The “Presumptuous We”**

If we go on saying ‘we’ even if it does not represent the new situation, it can smooth over our fear of splitting up, of rejection, or of unending conflict. And so, despite the fact that it is presumptuous to say “we” anymore, we continue to generalize, one side speaking for the other without it being accurate. It becomes taboo to tell the truth about the differences, out of these fears. So when one side says “we”, the other side falls silent. At times, the side doing the speaking does not even know that their voice has become inauthentic to the others – but maybe they don’t really want to know, or bother ask about it. Both sides can lack courage to say that “we” is no longer completely true.

*But why can’t we just be positive, silently forgive each other, keeping these things from disturbing us and threatening so many good things?*

Because the alternative – accepting the pressure to conform – is also devastating, in different ways. In the long run, worse ways.

When we outwardly conform, continuing to say “we” when we have a feeling we are betraying our true thoughts, we no longer trust that we have permission to be real. We don’t know if we are being loved for ourselves anymore, or just being used. There is no sense of unconditional love, because agreement has become the condition of being together. And now, we don’t know if the conflict that we’ve smoothed over would be handled with great forcefulness, indifference, or worse. We have chosen not to know. In the meantime, no one grows or learns from the other viewpoint, and so positions harden, and become strident in the silence. And throughout the community, trust decreases. Low trust becomes normal.

The end of that path is almost surely the same disintegration that comes down the first path. Only now, the differences have corroded both our hearts and our relationships. And how much more violent the war, or severe the withdrawal!

*Is there a way to let differences emerge that can be both loving and productive?*

There is no guarantee that the differences won't prove too much to stay together in the old way. Certainty must be let go of; it is an idol. Change can be severe, but it will be more severe if it is left too long, and then conflict comes at low trust. What we can be certain about however, is the one thing that we have control of: our own willingness to let differences emerge without trying to control or marginalize the other side. When this is done, in the three ways outlined below, trust and compassion have the best chance of growing. When differences are faced at high trust, there are very different outcomes than when those same differences emerge at low trust.

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At low trust, there is war or withdrawal. At high trust, two sides can hear each other deeply. Then they can decide how closely they can continue to live and work together without the threat of rejection or contempt hanging overhead. They can also find creative ways to make room for each other to be different. These "third way" possibilities never reveal themselves at low trust.

Following Jesus' teaching to love those who are different than ourselves, a community can often go beyond just managing to make room for each other; they can actually serve the purposes of those different than themselves. In the teaching of Jesus, both in the Sermon on the Mount and the Unity Prayer he prayed before his death in

John 17, this love that crosses the great divides, serving even its enemies, is seen as the greatest sign of the Kingdom of God.

**But to get to this place of unity without suppressing differences, there are four courageous things that must be done:**

1. Press pause on generalizing.
2. Make it safe for differences to come to light.
3. Find the heart values behind these different positions.
4. Hear the stories of how these values were formed.

When someone says “We” and someone else knows that there isn't real heartfelt agreement, what's needed is a pause. Otherwise, low trust follows.

Either side can press pause. Both sides must respect the other's right to take exception. Of course, this moment can be difficult for both sides, and courage is needed. Nonetheless, communities that love each other can have an agreement, sometimes tacitly, or better yet, openly, that anyone at any time can press pause and request exploring deeper. When the culture of a community permits this sort of moment, even celebrates it, dread diminishes and people are much less likely to resort to gossip and sneaking around to strengthen their own position behind others' backs.

Every group's health can be partly judged by how easily anyone can press pause on a *presumptuous we*. This is not a technique; it is a basic ingredient of love. Groups that do not give themselves freedom to do this violate the freedom that love gives.

Pressing pause does not mean that people stop serving each other. In fact, one of the beautiful things about this moment is that people can choose to continue acting in ways that serve the other side. What does change, however, is that there is no pretense that the needs, perspectives, or feelings are the same for everyone. This state cannot go on forever; it's transitional. This service is a gift; a gift that enables a community hanging together to go deeper in GYVE. Without this gift, the community is destined to swiftly fracture.

## **Yours and Mine**

Once pause is pressed, two individuals or groups can choose to go deeper instead of rushing forward. This can be done by three successive questions, each of which leads to more deeply understanding each other and, possibly, mutual compassion. They progressively break the power of a

*presumptuous we* and pave the way for a new, authentic *we* that takes account of both sides.

The first question simply asks, “How are you and I different? Your perspective - how is it different than mine? Your needs - how are they different than mine? Your feelings?” Perhaps it is also important to ask if we have different roles in the discussion (i.e. regarding leadership involvement and thus power differentials). Perhaps one of the parties is more vulnerable to certain outcomes. These are both different kinds of needs.

Comparing the different needs, one side to another, is sometimes necessary, but often fraught with difficulty. However, Jesus seemed to consistently weigh conflicting needs by considering whose needs made them most vulnerable. The needs of the priest to get to his destination were clearly outweighed by the needs of the

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man laying bleeding beside the road. The point of this parable was to notice and respond to vulnerability. However, comparing needs can set us up for a competition between apples and oranges, so to speak, and can introduce an element of trying to outdo each other: whose need is more valid? Because GYVE attempts to create a gentle differentiation of needs based on the hope that, later on in the process, room may be made for both sets of needs, it is often better to leave the comparative weighing of needs for the deeper levels. There it can be done with both more accuracy and compassion.

*Yours and mine* must be gentle and patient, with no hurried push to get quickly back to *we*. If there is impatience in getting through this phase, back to being able to generalize again, it backfires. The differences that emerge become like trench warfare, stubbornly dug-in positions from which and to which



assaults are made - and now with more accuracy. It is in this moment that we must persistently refuse to try to convince each other with pressure.

In simple situations, obvious room needs to be made for the others' differences. In such a case, an authentic we can be reformed at this level, integrating both sides. More often, however, in any deep discussion, the parties cannot rest simply recognizing differences. We must know why they are important to each other. Thus, we ask each other the question that drops us down to the third level of GYVE: "Why is that position important to you?" This is about what we value in our heart.



## Values

Behind every significant difference revealed as we explore *Yours and Mine*, there is a deeper fear or a hope, something our heart is running from or towards. To put this into words

and to reveal it to someone at apparent cross-purposes with us is bold; it is giving your adversary a gift and treating them with great dignity and respect.

"Why is this important to you?" must be followed by "Here is why it is important to me." If honest sharing is not done by both sides at this level, it has the potential for one side to stay aloof.

This is a depth where it is indeed possible for a sort of miracle of compassion to emerge. It does not occur often above this depth. It comes in a moment when that which was formerly at odds with

one's needs, purposes, or perspectives suddenly seems valid at a heart level. It may not be obvious how the differences can exist in our life together, but in a moment like this we know deeply, in our heart, that our adversary has a profoundly valid reason in their heart. You begin to see with their eyes and while you cannot always agree with the positions they have built upon this value, heart meets heart, and you recognize common ground. When this happens, it is truly a work of the Spirit of God.

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This doesn't always happen at this level. The depths of compassion may still evade us. We may express a value but still withhold how our life has formed around it. We can avoid sharing the landscape of our life despite stating what we value. Drop down, then, a final level. Ask, "Where did that become important to you? In which events or relationships did that value form?"

## Experiences

Despite protests to the contrary, none of us hold our deepest values through simple logic. We have all had events or

relationships in which we learned to treasure these things from experience.

When we share what we value, we are making our heart vulnerable. But when we share the events or relationships in which we learned to value that thing, we go even deeper in offering insight into ourselves. We are giving people an opportunity, then, to empathize with the process that created us to be us. While it is hard to argue with someone's story (and obnoxious!) it is possible that they may not treat with

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respect the painful or sensitive nature of these events. To risk that disrespect for the sake of the possibility of them knowing you is an act of the deepest courage. It is choosing to hope rather than to be cynical. It is hope for understanding and compassion. It is hope for someone who may not share

our values on the surface—to potentially share our values at a deeper level of resonance.

## **What is it about sharing our deepest experiences that can create such compassion and understanding?**

The first thing is nuance. Your ability to see nuance in a person happens when one's heart stops saying, "Oh, I know your type, you guys always..." When you listen deeply to a person's story, it is much less likely you simply relate them to other people that have hurt or broken your trust in the past. Their story sets them apart because of its nuanced details, and you begin to perceive them more deeply as a unique person, not just a category. Their needs or beliefs often seem more sensible, given their unique experience - even if you still disagree with them. And your overgeneralizations about them fall away.

When you see a person in a nuanced way, new possibilities emerge of being together with them. For instance, if you previously just thought of them as a person who was selfish, now perhaps you can view them as a person with outstanding legitimate needs, that can sometimes be selfish but at other times, very valid, given their story. It becomes possible to imagine a true friendship with them, because it's now apparent that they are not purely selfish. One can imagine that if there were boundaries in place, and a permission to talk honestly about moments when they seem selfish, they could actually be an ally or friend.

There is often a gentle dialogue that happens between one's head and one's heart as their story is heard. The heart may say, "But they are just like so-and-so who I have no respect for" while one's head may respond - "but wait! Maybe I have too swiftly judged them." Conversely, one's mind may say, "they are wrong," but one's heart might grasp that they have deep reasons for not doing what we think they should.

Besides the nuances that we begin to see in people, this level of listening also reveals our *common ground*.

Henri Nouwen wrote, "anyone trying to live a spiritual life will soon discover that the most personal is the most universal, the most hidden is the most public, and the most solitary is the most communal." The surface of our storylines may seem worlds apart, but when we reveal the deepest story of what happened to us to form us, there is often a surprising common ground that we share. People that have taken opposite positions on an issue have often done so for profoundly similar reasons: self-preservation, perhaps, or love for a child. These are unexpected glimpses into the reality that we are all made in God's image.

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What happens at the bottom? Perhaps, nothing. If no compassion or understanding has been created, people can detach, wanting to go separate ways. This is simply tragic, if it happens because we have refused to let our own ego refuse to let us see compassionately or deeply. It is possible to grieve the Spirit of God as it works to show us how God sees them.

It can also be legitimate to realize that while we have new compassion or understanding, it would not be an easy fit to have our lives aligned closely. But could it be that that work is what God is asking of us? Jesus, who taught us that being his followers would be shown by how we loved each other across many divides, will often lead us into the hard work of this kind of love. When His followers shirk this greatest command (John 14) in favour of making things easier on ourselves, we are often spurning the greatest gift, the greatest sign, that the church can show to the world: the love that crosses differences, the love that made Christ 'die for us, while we were yet sinners.' This is self-indulgent.

On occasion, is it legitimate to say goodbye? It is true that sometimes we are at such cross-purposes that it is better to love each other from more distance. But only after deep self-examination of our ourselves, in which we question whether we are just wanting to indulge either our pragmatism at the expense of the miracle of love, or simply to make things easier for ourselves by avoiding the hard work of figuring out how to support each other given our diversity.

When some distance is needed, our minds can simply reach for an either-or, all-or-nothing solution. But unity and diversity can blend in many creative ways. If we are slow and deliberate, asking many "I wonder if this could work" questions, perhaps the way of being together may appear after time. Almost always after some time! And with it, the miracle of love.

In that moment, Christ is revealed. And so is a more beautiful way to be together, moving forward, at higher trust.



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