

ReFraming Failure:

Lessons from a Post-Modern Clapham Sect

Rebecca Pousette tells the story of a course which now has 9000 participants in over 30 countries, following a depressing start with Christian oil executives in Calgary.

Seven years ago, under the leadership of Paul Williams, the Marketplace Institute at Regent College, Vancouver in Canada brought together a group of Christian oil executives in Calgary, Alberta to strategise how they might influence the city for good. The group was called *ReFrame* and was modelled after the Clapham Sect, the group of prominent London evangelicals at the turn of the 19th century who came together with shared Christian conviction to work for social reform, most famously for the abolition of the slave trade. Calgary, a Canadian city known for its deep Christian heritage, industrious western spirit, and growing global influence in the energy sector seemed an ideal context for *ReFrame*. They hoped to reconcile economic, environmental, and social concerns with their faith, and collaboratively work towards gospel transformation in the city.

ReFrame shared a common desire to maintain the integrity of their faith in every aspect of life and a passion for impacting the oil sector with the gospel. What quickly became evident however was that they did not share a common understanding of what

holistic, reconciling Gospel transformation looks like. Many lacked a vision of faith that held up under the dominant and competing narratives governing economics, environmental science, and theories of social cohesion. Differing views on creation stewardship and intelligent responsibility emerged, and it became impossible to move forward with a cohesive vision and mission.

The Calgary Clapham Sect experience confirmed what had become apparent to the Marketplace Institute: there was a discipleship gap in the western church. While many Christians had a passion for Gospel, they often lacked a vision of their faith that could inform or hold up under the competing pressures and complexities of modern life.

Ceri Rees, current Director of Public Engagement at Regent College, explains that “part of the reason for the tension and disconnect people feel is that we have narrowed the gospel to the realm of the private and sacred, to our worship on Sunday and our personal piety. We have forgotten that Jesus Christ claims lordship over all of life: our work, our play,

our families and our engagement in civic life.” This privatised understanding of the gospel is enforced by a dominant secular culture that perpetuates the idea that faith is irrelevant to the public realms of science, business, education, and politics.

The rise of a global faith and work movement in recent years gives testimony to this acute sense within the Christian church of a divide between the private and public. As Marketplace Institute staff engaged in work with believers around the globe, they realised that it was going to take more than a renewed theological vision of work to bridge this gap. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre writes, “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”¹ *ReFrame* Producer and former Marketplace Institute Director Mark Mayhew states “we realised that for Christians to engage their vocations and places of influence with a prophetic voice and confidence in the transforming power of the gospel, they needed a fresh encounter with the gospel story that makes sense of all of life.”



Calgary-based Canadian International Oil Corporation's operation in Alberta

The *ReFrame* course was birthed in an attempt to tell the gospel story afresh. Drawing on Regent College's core curriculum and world-class faculty, *ReFrame* brings participants into the Biblical narrative, equips them to discern the stories told by culture, and invites them to see with fresh eyes where God is at work in the world, and in their own stories. After successfully running a number of live pilot courses in Vancouver, and a basic film version in the US, Australia and China, the Marketplace Institute embarked on producing a professional quality film-based course in partnership with The Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation and Culture.

In the fall of 2014, after two years of production, *ReFrame* was released in both digital and DVD formats. Designed for small groups, *ReFrame* consists of 10 forty-minute videos and accompanying small group guides. The course brings together theological teaching from Regent College Faculty, interviews with Christian thought leaders such as Andy Crouch, JI Packer, and Krish Kandiah, and stories of Christians from around the world who have "reframed" their understanding of vocation within the Christian narrative.

Entrepreneur Hugo Ciro is one of these featured practitioners. After finishing his BA in Economics and Business, he found himself struggling to reconcile his desire to be an entrepreneur with his Christian faith. For Hugo, the realisation that the story of scripture includes the restoration of commerce and trade was liberating. It enabled him to reframe his vision and calling to business through the lens of Jesus Christ. Today Hugo is co-founder and CEO of Level Ground Trading, a

company in which he has had the opportunity to integrate his faith into every aspect of day-to-day operations. *ReFrame*'s goal is to help people like Hugo ground questions of vocation, mission and calling in the biblical narrative, developing in them a vision of the Gospel that connects to their particular callings.

Now, more than a year out from release, *ReFrame* has been used by approximately 1500 groups, with an estimated 9000 participants in over 30 countries. Additionally, the Lausanne movement has partnered with Regent College to provide *ReFrame* to thousands of delegates around the globe in preparation for their Young Leaders gathering in the summer of 2016. Most recently it has been translated and released with French and Spanish subtitles. Korean and Mandarin subtitles are forthcoming.


Stories from groups that have gone through the course attest that it is being received well.

One year ago in Vernon, BC, a small group of recent retirees were seeking to find a resource that would help them bring meaning to their retirement years. They came across *ReFrame* through an online search, and claim that their view on retirement has been forever altered. One participant reflects "ReFrame has lit a fire in a group that thought it was going to be put out to pasture. Not only have we been profoundly encouraged that none of our work has been wasted, and that our lives are not over yet, we've realised we may have something really valuable to give the next generation." This group of retirees has gone on to run the course for a group of young adults in their church, offering themselves as conversation partners and mentors to

young adults seeking to work out the gospel in their contexts.

In Washington State, retired consultant Bill Root took *ReFrame* to the prison ministry with which he volunteers. The course participants were primarily men in their final year of incarceration, anticipating life after prison. Bill says the response was absolutely overwhelming: "These were men with no hope of meaningful work after life in prison. *ReFrame* challenged them to re-think their vocation in light of their identity as ambassadors; they came away with a profound new sense of purpose and hope."

On the East Coast of the United States a small group of business executives recently ran *ReFrame* in their weekly morning Bible study group. The group was so encouraged by the content that they have gone on to lead their entire 1000 member church through the curriculum over this Lenten and Easter season.

We have been greatly encouraged by the diversity of the stories we are hearing. From farmers to students to food service workers and marketing executives, course participants repeatedly report an expanded vision of the gospel, an increased understanding of the relevance of scripture to all of life, and a fresh conviction that God cares deeply about their particular place in his Kingdom work. Our ultimate hope is that these participants will go on to live lives firmly rooted in the biblical narrative, courageously challenging the competing stories of the modern world, and fully confident that their particular calling is part of God's ultimate plan to restore all things. 

Reframe is available at www.reframecourse.com. Concession pricing is available for those who cannot afford the curriculum but would like to use it. Group licences are also available.

1. MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 216.



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