

Bedrock Beliefs

Greetings in the spirit of Christ... our refuge and strength!

My name is Tom Bandy. For over twenty years I have consulted with churches of all sizes, cultures, theologies, and traditions ... in North America and internationally. My website is www.ThrivingChurch.com.

This is the third of three videos to help you build a foundation of trust in your church.

Bedrock Beliefs are one of two elements that combine to create a Foundation of Trust. Bedrock Beliefs are different from Core Values, and consensus about both is necessary for trust. Core values are about predictable behavior patterns; and Bedrock Beliefs are about unshakeable faith convictions.

Today I want to guide you through the process of building clarity and consensus about Bedrock Beliefs. A Bedrock Belief is not a dogma, a theology, or an abstraction. It is a deep faith conviction to which people turn for strength in times of trouble or stress. They do this *instantly*, without waiting for the passage of time or consulting their priest or pastor. They do this *automatically*, without having to read a book or find a reference. Their heart and memory immediately flies to this conviction for strength.

Before the turn of the millennium (in the 80's and 90's), when Christendom still lingered in many places, churches only built clarity and consensus around Core Values. They said little about beliefs, assuming people already knew what Christians held true. Today, in the emerging pagan world, when there are countless spiritualities competing for attention, it is imperative for Christians to state their convictions plainly.

Seekers are not really interest in our theology. They are interested in the convictions on which we stake our career, our relationships, our lifestyles, and our very lives. A Bedrock Belief is the bottom-line confidence that allows Christians to hope for tomorrow. A church will do anything, change anything, initiate anything, terminate anything, and risk everything ... if they know what they *really* believe.

I am not saying that *theology* is unimportant. Indeed, *theology* is crucial to sustain a church long term and deepen spiritual life. Trust is like a fire around

which everyone gathers for light and heat. *Theology* is like hardwood. It takes wood a dense, heavy wood like Maple or Hickory to keep the fire going and maximize the glow. You don't start a fire, however, with hardwood. You start it with kindling. Bedrock Beliefs are like kindling. These are the convictions that "catch fire" in the hearts of seekers.

Here are three related definitions of a Bedrock Belief. You might want to pause this video to discuss each one so that you are clear about what a Bedrock Belief is:

1. A Bedrock Belief is a conviction of faith to which people turn for strength in times of stress, confusion, or trouble. It is an automatic response of the soul to the struggles of living.
2. A Bedrock Belief is the bottom-line confidence that allows Christians to hope for tomorrow. It is the way Christians confront the fundamental anxieties of emptiness, meaninglessness, fate, death, guilt, shame, and alienation.
3. A Bedrock Belief is an act of courage. It is a church's stand against the threats of being lost, lonely, trapped, dying, broken, abused, or discarded.

The Old is filled with illustrations of faithful people turning to God in times of stress. David is on the run, but believes the Lord is his Shepherd. Job suffers greatly, but is confident that his redeemer lives. Israel faces war, but Isaiah proclaims: *Fear not! For I am with you! I will help you, strengthen you, and uphold you with my victorious right hand!*

So also the New Testament is filled with examples Christians staking their lives on clear convictions. In the midst of persecution, Paul declares nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ. Perfect love casts out fear. Ask, and it will be given; seek and you will find. If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation! There will be a new heaven and a new earth, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Bedrock Beliefs may be a memorable verse from scripture. But they are often the verse of a hymn or song. For example:

Amazing Grace! That saved a wretch like me...

Thirst quenched, soul revived, and now I live in him.

Like a mighty river flowing is the perfect peace of God

I am the Lord of the Dance ... and I'll lead you all wherever you may be!

You breathe and there is health; you move and there is power

The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong, and none shall be afraid

We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer

O thirsty soul drink at the well; God's living water will never fail

Be still my soul, for God is on your side...

You are giving and forgiving; ever blessing, ever blest...

The love of God is broader than the measures of the mind; the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind.

PAUSE

The process to build clarity and consensus about Bedrock Beliefs is similar to the process we use for core values. A team should be appointed to organize, lead, and monitor the process. It takes about 4-6 weeks of intentional work. You may need to set other activities aside, so that you can concentrate on this task. The best time to pursue do it is often during Advent or Lent, when worship attendance is strong and people are prone to reflect on their faith.

There are three basic steps:

Step #1: Large Gathering and Table Groups

This may take the form of a leadership retreat for large churches; or it could be a congregational gathering for small churches.

The best place to hold the retreat or meeting is *outside the church building*, but *within the mission field*. It is helpful to gather away from the building, because the distractions of property, memories of past hurts, and obsessions with sacred cows tend to encourage factions and undermine consensus. However, it is best to stay inside the mission field, rather than go to a campground or retreat center in the woods, because the context of *real people* and *public diversity* helps sharpen our awareness of both Bedrock Beliefs and spiritual doubts.

The retreat process or meeting is to create two lists.

The first list identifies the top 10 (or 12) Bedrock Beliefs to which our church people instantly and automatically turn for strength in times of trouble. Occasionally we might be overwhelmed by grief or fear, but soon our heart turns to these Bedrock Beliefs like a compass returning to True North. One church in the mission field of Las Vegas defined these beliefs:

1. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13)
2. Trust in the Lord... And God will make straight your path (Prov. 3:5)
3. Ask and it will be given; Seek and you will find (Luke 11:9)
4. Fear not! I am with you. I will strengthen and uphold you (Isa. 40:31)
5. Faith, Hope, and Love abide ... the greatest of these is Love (1 Cor. 13)
6. God forgives unconditionally ... and inspires us to forgive (Mt. 6:12)
7. *Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see!*
8. *Because He lives, we can face tomorrow ... All fear is gone*
9. God give serenity when things can't be changed; courage when life can be altered; and wisdom to know the difference.

What if our church really believed this? What if every member could share these convictions readily with any friend, family member, co-worker, or strangers that they meet? How much could we bless others! How joyous would be our worship celebrations!

PAUSE

The second list usually emerges from the discussion of the first. The second list identifies the spiritual doubts that constantly creep into our daily living. Authentic churches are as honest about their doubts as they are forthright

about their convictions. This helps them avoid judgementalism and participate in respectful conversations with each other and strangers to grace.

For example, the same church that listed the bedrock beliefs above, also listed these spiritual doubts:

- **Doubts about the healing power of God;**
- **Doubts about the possibility of forgiveness for terrible sins;**
- **Doubts about the near presence of the Holy Spirit;**
- **Doubts about the meaning and importance of the sacraments;**
- **Doubts about the truth of scripture;**
- **Doubts about life after death;**

Church people were not happy with their spiritual questions, but they worked hard to learn and grow in their faith in order to overcome doubt.

PAUSE

The method used to create these lists involved a fairly typical process of table group conversation; reporting and discussion; and more table group conversation. There were compromises and debates. The final results collated the best insights of the group ... but were unfinished and tentative.

Both lists are then written down and distributed to all participants ... and placed in the Sunday bulletin for the next several weeks to stimulate prayer and discussion. Members can use this as a check list ... and count how often they articulate or remember their bedrock beliefs ... or wrestle with spiritual doubts.

Step #2 Small Groups or Focus Groups

The results of the retreat or meeting are tentative. As a general rule, only active participants come to a retreat or large meeting. In order to build consensus, their insights must be tested and expanded through conversation with less active church members and others.

Focus groups can be held anywhere, but usually away from the church building. They may meet in private homes ... but be sure to include groups in care-giving institutions to allow less mobile members to participate. Small

groups should be no more than 12 people and no fewer than 6 people. This is small enough to encourage everyone to have a voice, but large enough to ensure diversity of opinion.

The goal of each small group is to review and refine the two lists that emerged from the retreat or large meeting. Every group should have a facilitator. This person may also be a hostess, but he or she should be able to encourage conversation that includes everyone, and record the revised lists that emerge from the group. These lists are shared (without any names) with the coordinating team.

It usually takes 2-3 weeks to gather as many small groups as possible. Be sure to provide options. Some people attend a group because they know and trust the person who is facilitating it. Others attend a group because the time and place is most convenient.

PAUSE

Step #3 Congregational Gathering

This second large gathering should be an invitation to everyone in the congregation (members and active adherents).

The Coordinating Team will have gathered, collated, and synthesized all the revisions for the various small groups. The new list of bedrock beliefs and spiritual doubts may be a bit longer. This large gathering will follow the usual table group process of discussion and reporting.

The result is a "final" list of top 10 bedrock beliefs ... and a number of spiritual doubts. These are not carved in stone. Next year a church process can revise it again, if necessary. However this list can now be used in several ways:

- Place the bedrock beliefs on the website for all to see;
- Use the bedrock beliefs for a membership assimilation and leadership training;
- Place them in job descriptions and committee mandates;
- Evaluate all ministries, curricula, liturgies, and ministry leaders regularly.

One church urgent to share faith, and copied the Bedrock Beliefs onto a bookmark for distribution to visitors, and incorporated them into a confirmation class. They were also so intentional about dialogue and reflection, and included both convictions and doubts into personal and small group study guides.

There are various exercises and resources on my website that you can use or customize for your own process to build clarity and consensus about core values.

Congratulation! You have completed the second element to create a Foundation of Trust!