

Walking in Harmony With the Four Directions

Reflections on the Gospel & Native American Culture by Willie Krischke

Here is one way to present the gospel to Native American people. It is an attempt to understand and speak into a worldview that is different from the White, Western, post-Enlightenment worldview in which I grew up, without losing the essence of the gospel.

The Four Directions



Creator made us and loves us, and wants us to live in harmony and balance with the four directions — with Creator, within ourselves, with other people around us, and with the rest of creation. When we live in this harmony and balance, we are at peace, and we are happy and fulfilled in our lives. Navajos call this “walking in beauty” (or *hózhǫ́*) to the Lakota it is “the Red Road,” and the Jews call it “shalom.” It is the way we are meant to live.

But many things can bring disharmony in our lives, or knock us out of balance, and bring pain, confusion and chaos into our lives. Most often it is the choices we ourselves make. Sometimes it is the choices other people make that affect us in bad ways. And these days, we live in a world that is so out of balance – you can see it all around us — that just living in this world is enough to destroy our sense of balance and harmony. These things that destroy balance and harmony in the four directions – within us, with Creator, with each other and with creation – are what the Bible calls sin. My Lakota friends call it “walking the black road.”

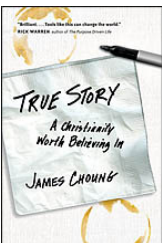
Many people have tried many different ways to bring balance and harmony back to the four directions. But it doesn’t always work. Sometimes they will find harmony for a little while, and then lose it again. Sometimes we get so lost from the path of beauty that we can’t find our way back, and we spend most of our lives wandering through the wilderness looking for it, seeing glimpses here and there, but never really knowing how to walk in it.

But because Creator made us and loves, us, He does not leave us to wander in the wilderness of disharmony and chaos. Creator sent his son, Jesus, to walk among us and show us how to walk in harmony with the four directions, because we had forgotten. And through his death and resurrection, he has defeated the dark powers that lead us away from the good road. And even today, he sends his Spirit to us to give us the power and wisdom we need to walk in harmony and live in good relationship with the four directions – with Creator, within ourselves, with each other, and with creation.

And so to follow Jesus means to walk in harmony, because we are following him in the way he walked. And it means to trust that we have the power to walk in harmony, even in the midst of a broken world full of broken people who have lost their way, because he gives us that power through his spirit. And finally, it means to offer that power to heal and restore to others around us, as we invite them to walk in harmony alongside us, and to spread the good news of Creator's son to the world, hoping and trusting that one day, through the power of Jesus, all of creation will be brought back into harmony, and things will once again be the way Creator intended them to be at the beginning.

Notes

1. This is still very much a work in progress, as my understanding both of the Gospel and of Native cultures and traditions continue to grow and develop. Like all gospel presentations, it is overly simplistic. My hope is that it opens doors for further conversations about who Jesus is, what his death and resurrection meant, and what it means to follow him, among other things.
2. I'm calling on bits and pieces from several different Native traditions to put this together, and that will always be problematic. While many Native American worldviews have a great deal in common, they are not identical or monolithic. A Navajo will do a better job of contextualizing the gospel for Navajos than I can do, a Lakota will do better with Lakotas, etc. If you are Native and reading this and feel I'm getting something terribly wrong, please – let me know. This is a work in progress and I'm open to correction.
3. I owe a great deal to James Choung and his presentation of the Gospel as [The Big Story](#). Please visit that link and watch his video. I have used the "four circles" diagram often with Native American students, and found it very helpful in communicating the gospel to them. In a lot of ways, what follows is just a slight cultural adjustment of the work Choung has done. I also want to recommend his book, "[True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In.](#)"



4. I also owe a great deal to Randy Woodley and his book, "[Shalom and the Community of Creation](#)" (which i haven't finished yet – I'm reading it slowly, to savor and fully digest all its goodness.) The ideas about balance, harmony and shalom come almost entirely from Randy (augmented by conversations I've had with Native students.)

