

Foundation in Discipleship Series

“Help, I need a real FAITH!”



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Prologue – ‘life happens’

“I believe, I believe, help my unbelief.” Do you remember that? I sure do – Mark chapter 9. It is one of those passages reserved just for me; well, I think that sometimes. What I love about this passage is that this father, this ‘dad’ who has lived with his son’s debilitating and destructive illness for so long is actually daring to hope. Could it be done? Could this ‘Teacher’ really fix this problem and deliver my son? “It’s been here so long! I want to believe, but...” Have you ever been there? If you are to any degree serious about your walk with Jesus, then I bet you have!

What I get excited about is that Jesus was not impeded by this doubt. Does that make you breathe a sigh of relief? It does for me! You see, all this dad really had to do was cry out with an honest and sincere heart that dared to challenge the doubt.

Over the years, particularly as a young adult, I have walked in varying degrees of confidence in my Lord and in His power, goodness and wisdom. I have had the privilege of seeing our mighty God do instant miracles. I have also experienced the pain of seeing an apparent passivity on Heaven’s behalf toward a desperate cry of my heart. One thing I have learnt over time is that faith can be a fragile thing, and it can be a forceful thing, however above it all is my Heavenly Father, His plan and the finished work of His Son which are ultimately unaffected by either the frailty or the force of our faith. But be rest assured, the level and state of our faith will affect us!

So, what about this thing called faith? Questions asked by everyone from you and I to the Apostle John include: how can I get it; how does it work; and how do I get more? As I said earlier, I have had a number of interesting experiences with this very subject - let me take you on a brief journey.

I remember when I first started teaching on faith at the age of 21 in a small country church. I put out the challenge to believe, and a father brought out his young son for ministry. I recall praying for this boy with some trepidation; you know, the ‘maybe my rhetoric was bigger than my faith’ stuff. But God ministered and healed this lad of his minor, but very real, upset.

I recall one instance where Carolyn (my wife) was suffering from a very debilitating migraine – OUCH! I laid hands on her and prayed a simple prayer, and as usual ‘feeling’ nothing. But the pain left her, instantly! In fact she said, “Honey, as soon as you put your hand on me, before you spoke a word, my headache left.” On another occasion, again in the lounge room of our little flat, I prayed for a severe headache. This time, a few words into the prayer and Carolyn collapsed at my feet, unconscious! About 30 seconds later she came to, pain free! WOW!!

Our first-born son came into the world with a bowel disorder, one that we were told, required several surgical procedures to rectify. I distinctly recall Exodus 9:16 coming clearly to me – *“I’ve raised Pharaoh up that I may demonstrate My power through him.”* I knew that was a divine prompt. I laid hands on my little baby boy and took authority over this affliction. Again I ‘felt’ nothing, but I knew, *I knew*, God had healed him. Even told the doctors so! You can imagine that drew some interesting responses. One doctor even chuckled when I told him any test he did would prove negative. You should have seen the look on his face when the tests were negative – it was priceless. I don’t mean that in an arrogant way, but it was a mix of disbelief, humiliation and a kind of “What is your story!” inquisitive look. Suffice to say, after five days Jaye began to (how does one say this delicately?) evacuate his bowel most gratifyingly!

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This is probably the only time I'd use that term, gratifyingly, in relation to a bowel 'movement' - but laugh! Humidicrib and doctor were decorated!

We knew times of great provision from the Lord too. We lived on very little and were able to do a surprising amount with it. Many of our friends were often amazed at how we managed. We really simply trusted God. It wasn't difficult or in any way unrealistic - we just believed in Him and were relaxed in Him and didn't focus on the need, only the provider.

Around the same time the lounge room of our little flat became the scene of another miracle. Yes! God showing up in lounge rooms and healing people...what will be next...showing up in church! Anyway, an unsaved downstairs neighbour came in one day. He knew we were nuts for Jesus, but still real folks! (He couldn't work that out) I asked the customary, "So how are you?" Paul began a tale of woe which concluded with the car he was restoring dropped on his forearm and made a mess of his muscles, to the point that the forearm was very difficult to move and extremely painful. With as much external confidence as I could muster, and without sounding like I was hoping he would decline the offer, I said, "Paul! Do you mind if I pray for your arm?" He replied with a reluctant "OK!" Then I asked a second question - a question designed to engage him in faith. The question was one I heard asked by a faith teacher years ago - do you believe God will heal you? He reticently answered - "I don't know." I quickly and tenderly asked the final question - "Paul, do you believe that if I pray for you, God will heal you?" I'll never forget his response. With quiet reserved glee and tantalising hope, he said, "Yeah - I think so!" So, again feeling nothing, I laid hands on his arm and prayed a short prayer. What happened next perplexed me. Paul simply looked startled, turned away and said, "I've got to go!" He left! I thought nothing more of the event - simply knowing that God was in control. It was not my job to heal - it was my job to pray!

About three days later I bumped into Paul downstairs. He was a little 'edgy' but said he was sorry about leaving so abruptly the other day but he felt very strange when I had put my hand on him. Paul confessed that there was this 'tingly sensation' all through his arm and then he reported that all the pain had left. His arm was normal again and he hadn't had a problem since! I simply explained that God had healed him. Paul accepted that and we simply continued our conversation, as if it was just another day.

Now I could dole out some other testimonies of faith and how God has done unquestionably supernatural things. However, I want to now take you to... "The dark side!"

How can I put this delicately...um...I don't think I can. Things began to go very much 'sideways'. Fortunately, time will not permit me to take you on my 'descent' but it wasn't pretty, well, at least from where I was standing it wasn't. I could tell you of events, circumstances and people and 'stuff' (The technical term for the vicissitudes of life). I could write of disappointments, misunderstanding, and loss of confidence. I could endeavour to externalise blame, point the finger and weep with grief at the abuses of Christians and the unfairness of life, woe, woe, woe is me...but that is really not the point. The point is that my 'inside' needed to be recalibrated and enlarged. I had not yet, from the inside, understood the *character* of God. What happened was essentially a journey of discovering another side of faith.

There have been days of anguish, doubt, trying too hard and times of despair where nothing would go right, I mean nothing! Family members were sick and I had no answers. We were also at the point of bankruptcy with serious marriage problems - the list went on...



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As you can imagine in all this I had become disillusioned, philosophical and often downright cynical. I had journeyed into frustration and even anger at God (crazy isn't it?). My existential crises had rendered me inert in this dynamic, and necessary, realm of faith. As you can guess, for sanity's sake I moved to the 'philosophical', and my pride would have kept me there if I hadn't continued to seek to know the *character* of God, but in humility and His grace I have found my way back into a growing boldness in faith. What was happening (which I couldn't at that point see) was that our Heavenly Father wanted me to see faith not only from a different angle but, more importantly, from a different perspective - *not* from Shane Varcoe's subjective 'God-concept matrix'. I needed to learn that God's character and purpose are what my faith should be committed to, and that God's character and purpose *are not* committed to *my* agenda. My heavenly Father has, and will no doubt, continue to recalibrate my life so the fullness of His goodness, wisdom and power may have the greatest opportunity for expression to, in and through me.

This small group 'Discipling' journey is aimed at helping your community discover a little more of heaven's perspective on holistic faith and faithfulness. It is by no means exhaustive, however I trust it will encourage, challenge and assist you to walk past the cynical and philosophical references of this damaged culture, and into the faith that pleases heaven.

Study, discover, pray for one another, walk with each other and believe for the impossible!

Still in His grip.... Shane



Preface

Jesus is coming back - for a church without spot or wrinkle, a holy (single) church without blemish.

HA...you must be joking! Pardon my frank cynicism, but if the church is people and not a structure then we are in trouble, and God has His hands full. All I have to do is look at myself, and the briefest scrutiny reveals I have enough ‘spots and wrinkles’ for a whole chunk of the church. Guess what? I am not alone! Think about it.

I’ve been accused innumerable times of being an ‘idealist’. My philosophy has always been that I serve an ideal God and so I can afford to be an idealist. I think the following demonstrates God is an idealist and praise His name He *can* perform the ideal!

A question I must ask, and one that must be answered, is do you believe in miracles? When I answer this question scenarios such as raising the dead, the maimed having limbs restored and blind eyes seeing come to mind together with the many miraculous things I have seen personally. However, regardless of what one’s response is, be it positive, negative or uncommitted, all will be compelled to discard mere mental assent, ignorance or unbelief concerning the miraculous when our Sovereign God begins to implement His agenda for the end of the age. I believe that one of the greatest miracles the Body of Christ will see is that which Christ prophetically foretold in John 10:16. There will be one flock and there will be one Shepherd. There will be a single, gathered, united Church. Paul reiterates the event in Ephesians 5:27, “*That He might present her to Himself a (single) glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*” (As I intimated earlier, I am glad it’s God who has to fix this one.)

I am firmly convinced that it is character and not gifting that is the immovable basis of tried and tested ministry. It is character that Satan works tirelessly to erode.

It is my belief that one of the more significant processes God is implementing to bring this great miracle to pass is the reinstating of **His Character Attributes** in His Body, the Church, (the stature of Christ – Ephesians 4:13).

These attributes of character are different to His nature and its qualities. His nature includes Love, Grace, Mercy, Tenderness, Gentleness, Kindness and Patience etc.

His character ultimately and specifically involves: -

1. Sincerity
2. Humility/Holiness
3. Integrity
4. Faith/faithfulness
5. Truth.

These attributes are not part of those transcendent qualities that make God supernatural (i.e. omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence and immutability). These qualities are not only attainable but clearly purposed by God to be immovably formed in the lives of each saint, as indicated by Ephesians 4:11-16. (Note acronym S.H.I.F.T. that speaks of the shifting away from carnality and shifting to God and His purposes.)

Aiding and abetting the formation of these character qualities in your life is the purpose of these studies.



Section one: **Faithfulness – Attitude**

The particular character attribute of God that we will address in this study is FAITHFULNESS. We will define this commonly used word in Biblical context and then work from that premise. The Hebrew word for faithfulness comes from *emunah* (em-oo-naw) which, means firmness, stability and security, all in a context of truth. It strongly implies **an immovable adherence to truth regardless of circumstances or events**. This definition certainly has qualities closely associated to what is commonly perceived to be *faithfulness*.

In this study I want to specifically focus on the New Testament definition. Interestingly enough, in the strictest terms, the word faithfulness does not appear in the Greek New Testament, but by gleaning from the Greek and English definitions and those characteristics that are portrayed through Scripture, we can compile the following definition:

Faithfulness is ‘firm in adherence to duty, observant of covenants, loyal, trustworthy and true’.

The greater definition, in which I believe we also find the previously mentioned characteristics, is found in the word it embodies, the word FAITH. Faithfulness intrinsically is a state of *being full of faith*.



Discovery Point: (Reflect and discuss ‘contracts’. Contracts need two parties to participate for them to be valid. What do you think it means **for us to be observant of God’s Covenants?**)

Your discussion notes:

Faith is paramount to God, exceeded in importance only by love. In fact, at its very core, love itself has the key attributes of faith.



Discovery Point: (Reflect and read 1 Corinthians 13:3-7. Note verse 7 and discuss the key attributes of love.)

Your discussion notes:



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I heard it once stated, “*God is a faith God. Therefore, we must be a faith people.*” I think that this is a very important truth to understand. The great Jehovah does not merely desire, but indeed *requires* faith. Hebrews 11:6 declares “...*without faith it is impossible to please Him...*” This very succinct statement makes it abundantly clear that in a progressive relationship with the Creator, faith can in no way be circumvented. However, our gracious Heavenly Father, while requiring faith from us, also *deposits that resource in us*. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith (faith is essential for salvation) and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*” Paul is saying even the seed of faith we have to grow is given to us by God. Our Heavenly Father supplies what we need and we must then exercise it.

Some commentators have defined faith as “the leaning of the entire personality on God with total trust in His goodness, wisdom and power,” but Paul gives us an added and more challenging definition and mode of what faith is in Hebrews 11:1.



Discovery Point: (*Pause and read Hebrews 11:1 and Mark 11:22-24 and discuss what you think may be the difference between hope and faith*) Your discussion notes:

Because faithfulness is a God attribute, it can only be God-oriented if it is truly God initiated.

Attitude and Commitment

The state of “being full of faith” is not an illusive one. In fact, it is one that our Lord desires and works incessantly to see developed in our lives. Romans 12:3, tells us plainly that to each is given a portion of faith. In simple terms, every individual born of woman has faith as a part of the “psyche anatomy”. It is not just a static deposit but also one that has the potential to grow.

(*Reflect and read Matthew 17:14-21*)



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Each mustard seed has in its genetic structure all the components necessary to become the mustard tree. However, it also requires cultivation, sowing, watering, fertilizing and pruning.



Discovery Point: (Reflect and discuss what you think this means in relation to your faith in light of Luke 13:6-9.) Your discussion notes:

I would define two essential aspects of faith/faithfulness as

1. **Attitude** and 2. **Commitment**.

These both in turn embrace specific and vital qualities.

Attitude

This aspect of faith by itself can, and has, inadvertently created controversy in many quarters. Take ‘positive thinking’ for instance. Being a principle of life that God purposed from creation, its application can still be advantageous even when misplaced. *The danger is that it can remove the focus from the Creator onto the created, and bring a misplaced emphasis and ultimately a reliance on ideas, philosophies and things other than Jesus Christ.*

Other components of attitude are a) **confession** b) **focus** c) **priority** and d) **expectation**, and they all need to be on or toward God and His purposes.

a) Confession

For many, this vital aspect of attitude is the belief that what one merely confesses with one’s mouth will materialize. However, confession is much more than verbalising a formulae and reciting religious rhetoric. *Confession is a verbalization of **what the heart and soul hold to be true**.* In that context, it is speaking out of faith.

Conversely, a negative confession repeatedly declared and proclaimed, even though it may not be what the heart and soul are wanting, can shift the faith into a destructive exercise. In simple terms, you begin to not simply profess but to also believe for the worst instead of the best. It is important to maintain a positive confession, and that is assisted by, and in turn develops, **focus**.



Discovery Point: (**Reflect:** Share and discuss what you consider to be ‘negativity’ as opposed to ‘critical assessment’, and consider its impact on your individual faithfulness.)



b) Focus

John the Baptist set what I call a ‘life precedent’ as recorded in John 1:29 when he declared and, I believe commanded, the people to “*behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” To behold is to “fix your gaze firmly upon and to look intently at.” It is indeed The Christ and His purpose on which we must **immovably focus** if we are to know the realization of those things for which we believe. It is focusing on the One who is able to do “*exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*” (Ephesians 3:20), the One “*who gives life to the dead and calls those things that do not exist as though they did*” (Romans 4:17) and the One “*to whom nothing is too difficult*” (Jeremiah 32:17).

WARNING: Watch out for faith focus on formula!

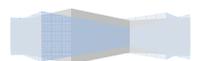
Ephesians 2:8 states, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves (God even gave us the faith to exercise); it is the gift of God.*”

Faith is a very precious commodity and one which, as we are discovering here, God requires us to use. Nevertheless, we are to use it **only according to His prescriptions**, and most definitely not to allow it to become the focus of our existence. We must remember that **our Father in Heaven is the Source** and faith is merely a vehicle/mechanism/tool that cooperates with the Source enabling Him to minister His life and power to and through us. *Faith was never meant to have a life of its own.* For if it does, history and yes, current events show it can become the focus, the source and, inadvertently or not it can/has been venerated or even idolised (worshipped). If or when this happens, faith will, at best, take focus off the true Source, Our benevolent Heavenly Father and the Author of Salvation, Jesus Christ and put it on this tool/mechanism/vehicle. At worst, faith becomes deified - it becomes god!

In Exodus 3, Moses was called by God and given a task to fulfil. He was called by grace, and through **faith**, he was to bring salvation to the captive Jews. To assist Moses fulfil this task, he was given an ally, a ante-type of faith, a ‘tool’ by which he could access God’s resources and power – it was the staff or rod. Moses knew God was the source and this rod a ‘tool’ graciously granted him. It was not earned but was a gift from God; a gift entrusted to a humble, submitted and reliant man who had nothing in himself to make a difference to the situation he was called to. Unfortunately, as so often happens with time and familiarity, something changed that.

(Reflect: Read Numbers 20:1-13)

At Kadesh, after many years of deep intimacy with the Father and through suffering an ever-growing number of immature and complaining people; Moses inadvertently, but gravely, crossed a line. The people needed water and God instructed Moses to ‘speak’ to the ‘Rock’ so



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that life-giving water would spring forth. Unfortunately, Moses did not pay attention; in fact, he is so caught up with his frustration that, as we read in Numbers 20:10, he speaks as an equal with God “*must we bring water from this Rock*”. (In Deuteronomy Moses is recorded as decrying the people for his exclusion from the Promised Land, not owning his error.... sound familiar?) The greatest tragedy occurs when Moses strikes the ‘Rock’ not once, but twice. (Paul tells us in his writings that the ‘Rock’ that followed the Jews in the wilderness was a type of Christ). Now he has used the ally, this ‘tool’ (the staff) to ‘beat’ the resource from the ‘Source.’ Yes, the Rock produced the water, but at what cost? The presumptuous misuse of this tool spelt death for Moses; he was not permitted to access the Promised Land.

Faith is a wonderful God-given tool, but it is not the source. Faith can produce much, but **it is only a tool to use to access the ‘Source.’** We must be very careful how we use it.

Saint of God, do not focus on faith in such a manner that you beat the Source to extract from Him what you deem necessary. Apply the tool *only* under divine directive and allow the Father, Son and Holy Ghost to exercise their power and release the resource that will bless you and honour Him.

Remember always that **it is only in correct focus that we will see clearly what priorities we are to set.**



Discovery Point: *(Reflect: Share and discuss any serious distractions from faith you have experienced. What did they look like and how did they affect your ‘gaze’ on Christ?)*

c) Priority



Discovery Point: *(Reflect: Share and discuss your individual priorities, past and present, and the reasons for them. Compare with others and discuss differences and how these compare with Biblical priorities, as you understand them. Note that this can be enlightening but must not be demeaning, so be sensitive but honest!)*



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This aspect of attitude, as insignificant as it appears, proves time and time again to be the source of either the greatest joy or the harshest disappointment for those who are truly pursuing God’s best. There are many insisting elements, factors, philosophies, ideas and principles, both in the natural and spiritual that attempt to influence our priority setting, and therefore our decisions and, ultimately, our actions. **In the realm of faith and faithfulness, the impossible can only be achieved when it is aligned with the expressed and revealed counsel of God – His Word!**

Messianic instruction makes our priority setting very clear. In John 15:7 Jesus declares “*If you abide in Me* (Priority 1: to be in Christ, having had appropriated, and continuing to appropriate the Christ life, in both character and nature), *and My Words abide in you* (Priority 2: a demonstration and experiential understanding of God’s principles of life and relationship), *you will ask what you will desire, and it shall be done for you.*” **God has promised, and Christ has ratified, that if our priorities are God’s priorities then He will withhold no good thing from us, for it will prove beneficial for you, His Kingdom and humanity.**

Identifying and aligning with God’s priorities will enhance all the facets of **attitude**, including the final, but no less vital, component which is **expectation**.

d) Expectation

Without expectation, faith is not possible. Another word for this, and one that has been the subject of volumes of exposition, is **hope**. It has been correctly stated that ‘without hope it is impossible to have faith.’ *Hope is the positive expectation of good.* Not just the desire or confidence, but also the reasonable grounds for it. This reveals again the need for the criterion of **focus, priority and confession**; all this being **on, in and of the one true God** and the finished work of His Son Jesus Christ. As with faith, **expectation must be God-focused in order to realize its full potential.** *Only that which is of truth and is eternal can bring to fruition that which is anticipated.*



Discovery Point: (Reflect: Discuss some of your expectations in the light of the other aspects of **attitude** and share your encouraging experiences.)



Section two: ***F a i t h f u l n e s s – C o m m i t m e n t***

We have briefly addressed what I believe are components of the attitude aspect of faith. However, it is the commitment aspect to faith that I want to specifically deal with in this discussion paper, as it embraces the qualities that are truly the manifestation of the Character of God in our lives.



Discovery Point: (*Reflect: Share and discuss your definition of commitment and some of the things that undermine or distract you from it.*)

I believe there are two immutable components of commitment, which are required in and are conducive to the formation of God’s Character in the life of the saint. They are **loyalty** and **perseverance**.

Loyalty

God has many desires for humanity, but the one thing He searches for in the crown of His creation is **loyalty**. 2 Chronicles 16:9 tells us *“the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”*

Loyalty embraces both obedience and trust. Obedience is the thing that God requires not for His own benefit but ours. It is trust, a willing desire to lean on God and happily align our thoughts, words and deeds with Him and His purpose, which ushers in and enhances that requirement of obedience, which ultimately leads us into the *demonstration of our love* for God.

John the ‘beloved’ is the one New Testament author that grants us some profound insights into the mysteries of the nature and nuance of the Triune God. In 1 John 5:3 he writes, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”* We see yet again, unequivocally a succinct defining of Love... In short, it is a willing obedience. No, it is not a feeling, led by a feeling or even influenced by a feeling. It is an act of willed obedience that declares this is a ‘right’ and therefore good. A feeling of peace or joy may eventuate, but these are not guaranteed or necessary for compliance.



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It is within this framework that I want to quickly look at Noah’s faith.

“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” Hebrews 11:7

What we know about the time of Noah and the request made of him by God to build an Ark, gives us an exemplary manifestation of the definition of faith as mentioned millennia later in Hebrews 11:1... **“Faith is the conviction of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.”** As tradition tells us, Noah or those in his immediate proximity had not experienced anything like ‘rain’ as we know it, let alone a deluge that would cover the whole earth and besides, he has to build a large ‘floatation’ device in the middle of a paddock, nowhere near water, which takes him decades to complete. Yet along with all these, what would be culturally and historically unprecedented activities, he has all his neighbours, friends and acquaintances, ridiculing him incessantly. And of course they would. Noah would seem like a mad-man. Going on about God’s judgment for years and years, whilst simultaneously building something the likes of which that known world would never have seen. The man, in that cultural context, is a NUTTER! However, Noah is convicted by hope, by what God has uttered and he believes, as substance what God has declared, but not yet manifested. Noah was a man of incredible faith and FAITHFULNESS.

“When Noah constructed the ark he gained not only the approval of God, but also the ridicule of men. Over the long years, as he built, the people gave voice to their blatant disbelief. God exercised His merciful patience and Noah offered his persistent obedience. By it Noah achieved three important things, salvation, witness and righteousness. Through his obedience his household was saved whilst others perished. His action affected his neighbours. They regarded his obedience to God as an act of folly, but ‘through his obedience he put the whole world in the wrong’ (NEB). In every generation Christian obedience has powerful evangelistic value. Men and women are influenced not only by what we say to them, but by the way we respond to what God says to us. Moreover, by his obedience he became the possessor of righteousness, which is God’s gift to the man who has faith in Him. Noah’s secret was in his total, unhesitating obedience to God’s revealed word for, as Scripture testifies, Noah ‘did all that God commanded him.’”¹

Whilst the above commentary of Hebrews gives us clear insight into the link with faith, obedience and its consequences, I personally want to focus particularly on the following part of Hebrews 11:7... *“by which he **condemned** the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”*

This is a dynamic of faith that is rarely, if ever, contemplated – the ‘judgment of faith’. This passage reveals a serious and somewhat ominous consequence. Whilst it is certainly unambiguous that there is a clear outcome to the unbeliever, it is the passive nuance of the text that is worthy of further investigation. By what did Noah (not God) ‘condemn’ (*Katakrito* – to pass sentence upon, to damn) the world? By his ‘faith and Godly fear’, but most importantly what that facilitates – obedient redemptive action! If the latter here is not manifest, then it is not ‘faith’ that is at play, but mere mental ascent at best. Let us look at the proactive nature, rather than the reactive nature of these faith outcomes. Through faith and its manifestation Noah became an heir to righteousness, an obvious benefit, but what of this ‘damning the world’ aspect, surely there is no positive here? It is my contention that this is one of the most powerful and positive revelations of ‘faith and faithfulness’ we can be given, and whilst it is ominous, it is also gloriously encouraging and proactive for the ‘lost’ and a stern ‘heads up’ for believers.

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- a) When we are ‘loving God’ (willingly obeying and faithfully implementing) a manifestation, a ‘sign’ if you like is afforded the unbeliever. They are granted example and demonstration of what is good and right and a warning about what will come, all whilst God graciously gives time for such a message to sink in.
- b) Most importantly, it is a ‘heads up’ for the believer. Your faith and faithfulness has such impact, whether you see it or not, that to deviate or exempt yourself from this imperative, is to turn off one of the key ‘beacons’ if you like, of warning for souls about to be shipwrecked on lost shores of a Christ-less eternity.

That faith Noah demonstrated and the emphasis the writer of Hebrews places on it, is a type of the Christ and His same proactive warning and ‘judgment’, all given while breath is in man, to prevent the ultimate tragedy. Let’s look at Jesus Christ the Messiah’s own words...

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. **He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**” John 3:16-18*

John the beloved continues later on in the chapter echoing a similar disturbing view of what unbelief will bring... *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” John 3:36*

If you haven’t worked it out yet, I’ll make it clear. Your faith is a billboard of hope, consolation and warning to all, when it is demonstrated, not merely spoken of. God can not use it to be a beacon when we step into places of unbelief and its offspring inconsistency, disloyalty, compromise and inertia.

God wants and works for your faith to hold! The world *needs* your faith to hold!



Discovery Point: *(Reflect. Discuss loyalty, obedience and consistency, and what would or has tested these and how have you, like Noah, overcome it?)*

Loyalty in adherence to duty and in observing covenants is precious and is sought after by God. For this reason Satan pits his **most devastating weapon** against it. There is a

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common anecdote that circulates in Christendom, the purpose of which is to give us insight into Satan’s weapons of war against the saints of God. The setting is a ‘garage sale’ to which demons congregate in the hope of learning of and purchasing devices for use in their insidious plots against Disciples of Christ. They peruse devices such as anger, hatred, fear and lust, but most attention is on the prize weapon of Satan which is set apart in veiled display in preparation for auction. As the demons wait in anticipation for its unveiling one asks another, ‘What is it?’ The other replies, “The most effective device we have ever had against God’s children – **discouragement!**”



Discovery Point: (*Reflect and read Luke 9:62 and Ezekiel 18:21-24.*

Discuss God’s desire and the implication of these scriptures. Share your experiences of discouragement and the impact they had on you and your perceptions of your relationship to, and service in, God.)

Perseverance



Discovery Point: (*Reflect: At this point read LUKE 18:1-8 and discuss what you think Jesus meant in verse 8)*

Faith in the right!

The woman was in the right; her persistence was to obtain what was *lawfully* hers. She was innocent, a victim, and she pursued her rights in a *legitimate fashion*. It was not the mindless pursuit of self-indulgence or the belligerent and premature avarice for an inheritance that would one day be hers.

Let us digress for a moment and look at a couple of examples of inappropriate and immature use of persistence (one must be careful in dissecting a parable and attempting to glean from it more than its lesson intended). ‘The prodigal son’ parable is a classic example of persistent claims for inheritance without the maturity and responsibility to be able to use it appropriately, productively and to ultimately ‘pass it on’. Yes, the son was forgiven on his return, after squandering the lot, growing up the hard way the son returned home and was forgiven, and yes, he was given back his title. However, he was no longer able to govern; he had dispensed of that which he once governed and so forfeited his function having no context for the use and dispensing of authority and responsibility, and he no longer had a productive



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inheritance to pass on to his progeny. (What was left belonged to his brother) The prodigal is essentially back in his immature role of having ‘rule’ but no governance.

At least he now has a servant heart and can be a model of such - that is a demonstration of God’s ability to redeem - to bring good from bad - but God always wants *the best*. Let us co-operate with the Master’s plan and exercise our faith in divine maturity.

We have and we continue to teach infant Christians, who do not yet even understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ, to pursue Abrahamic or Davidic Covenants. This is being done when their maturity, spiritual character, understanding of divine will and relational intimacy is all very under-developed. They are told of their son/daughter status and they want to exercise it NOW. Yes, it belongs to us immediately upon coming to Christ, but *we need to be prepared and equipped to exercise it*.

If Queen Elizabeth had died immediately after giving birth to Prince Charles he would have been declared king. However, could he have governed? He held the title, the position, power, prestige, profile etc., but could he rule, make wise decisions, give effective counsel and manage State affairs? No! Well, that is much like us when we are Born Again. We enter into a stage of infancy and from there, we are to grow in our relationship with our Father. Yes, He is immediately our Father and we are immediately His progeny, but the big difference between a child and an adult is not age but, through growing-up, maturity.

Let me paint another word picture. When I was one or two years of age, it was appropriate, right and even lovely to reach my hands up to my dad and say, “Play daddy, play.” If I did that at the age of ten it would be cause for some concern, at 20 years of age it would be a worrying matter indeed. Nevertheless, so much of our Christianity is like that! People who have been saved 10 years or more are still going, “...Daddy...play!”

My earthly father and I are very close. He is still my dad and I respect him immensely. However, we now relate and communicate as two mature adults. I often give him advice and insights, and he now learns from me. He is still my dad. I am still his progeny. However, I am no longer a child.

Our heavenly Father wants us to relate to Him in this progressive maturity, because it is in that process that God can devolve responsibility and greater task and authority to you to act, particularly since we are supposed to be acting on His behalf. **Faith was never meant to be wielded by immature souls for illegitimate and egocentric means, but for the honour and glory of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.**

Paul had a lot to say about growing up. He addresses this matter quite openly in the third chapter of his letter to the Galatians. His point is that as long as you remain infantile in your maturity then that immaturity requires you to have a tutor. The tutor is to bring you to a place where you can at least begin to exercise divine potential with some degree of God function and credibility. That tutor was and still isthe Law!

Hebrews 10:36-39 *“For you have need of **endurance**, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise. For yet a little while and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but we are of those who believe (cling to, rely on, adhere to, trust in) to the saving of the soul.”*



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This paramount component of faith, perseverance, is not only where ‘the rubber hits the road’, it is truly the self-perpetuating product of the forming of Christ’s character in the individual (and without that character this unsurpassed aspect of faith cannot be achieved).

I have, by gleaning from English and Greek definitions, defined perseverance as follows - **persistence** (continued, steady, willed effort) and **endurance** (courage and fortitude in bearing up unto completion). Note that ***it is only with and in the Christ and His purposes that these qualities invariably bring eternal fruit.***



Discovery Point: (*Reflect and read again Luke 18:1-8 and compare Mark 11:22-24. Discuss this paradox. One infers the instant, the other a process in time. Is it either/or, or is it and?)*

I want to digress again and get us all to kick around the following passage and look at how faith and grace might relate. Romans 5:1-5 “*Therefore, having been (past tense) justified (rendered innocent) by Faith (miraculous when we consider the almost immeasurable depths of our guilt) we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we also have access by Faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice (Greek word here is ‘boast’) in hope (confidence) of the glory of God.*” What grace? The Grace that is a) the current dispensation (the way God now manages things), b) the unmerited favour, and c) that is Christ crucified and all that entails. **We have access to that grace by faith.** Verse 1 declares that we are justified by this faith. Romans 2:13 presents us with a clear definition of what that faith may look like, “*for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.*” In other words, justification is in not merely hearing the law, but also living its counsel.

We enter into grace by faith, by trust, reliance and consistent obedience to the Word both written and incarnate. Paul also exhorts in Romans 1:17 that we have no option but to continue in faith “*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, ... (for) ... the just shall live by faith*”. He continues in chapter 5:3 “*we also glory (boast) in tribulations*”. Why? Because the tribulation produces **perseverance** (verse 4) and perseverance produces **character** (Greek word here is proof) and character produces **hope**. Verse 5 “*now hope does not disappoint*”. Why? Because **we have confidence in our reliance on Him, (not reliant on our confidence)** “*...because the love of God (which is the key to the grace in which we stand) has been poured out on our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*”





Discovery Point: *(Reflect and discuss Romans 5:1-5, specifically definitions and consequences of Perseverance. What proof and character did they develop in your life?)*

Don't Just Look at – Look Beyond

(Reflect and read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and briefly share your perceptions of this passage)

When most people read this scripture, they finish at the end of verse 17. It seems that they fail to see it is only the middle of a sentence, you have to continue reading until the full stop.

Affliction will only work an eternal weight of glory **when we look beyond the circumstances, not at them.** That glory (boasting) will only be realized when we look **beyond the seen, to the unseen**, because what is seen is temporal, but **what is unseen is eternal.** Therefore, we must look to the **Christ and His finished work.**

The 'light affliction' referred to here is not (as many imagine) a lifetime encumbrance, but temporary, as the boasting can only be experienced through the manifestation of the **saving, healing and delivering power of the triune God.** As Paul had previously declared in Romans 5:1-5, the affliction/trial brings proof (character). Proof of what? **The saving power of God!**



Discovery Point: *(Reflect: You may have heard this term 'perfect and permissible will'? It has been said that God has these two wills, discuss that along with the following phrase 'interim and ultimate will' and share what you think this means.)*



Section three: The Crowd Factor

It can appear, and indeed be, a simple thing to exhort one to look beyond, not at. But at this junction in history there are innumerable and very insisting elements that not merely interfere, but in most circumstances, *prevent us from looking away to the eternal and spiritual because the physical and tangible presents such formidable opposition. Nevertheless, look away we must and, as stated earlier, then fix our gaze on the Christ.*

It is this clatter and clamour that would hinder us that I wish to address at this point; the clamour of many voices, the clamour that I call ‘*The Crowd*’, the crowd that can take many forms.

The Crowd of Consensus

(Reflect and read Luke 19: 1-10)

For the pilgrim of God this is the first and often most dominating crowd. It is the indifferent, **spectator** crowd of those happily lost in a world where the materialistic, convenience-focused, philosophical and transient trends proliferate. The crowd that is satisfied in being first to peruse and superficially glance at that which may have value, that is if it can fit into the consumerist worldview they have contrived (the wall of what is commonly perceived as palatable is getting higher).

This crowd is driven by and in fact is itself the **consensus!** It has no time for the individual or for those that cannot or do not want to run with the maddening, unthinking mob. This crowd intimidates, often angrily, and silences by unscrupulous means. However, tragically for most, it also seduces, by coercive, plausible ideals that always attempt to reflect God’s truth as irrelevant, archaic dogma that only hinders what the so-called ‘enlightened masses’ are striving for.

Jesus is all too familiar with this crowd. He has, and continues to, pass by this crowd, always (while there is breath in man) giving opportunity for individuals to come out from its midst. Zacchaeus was a tax collector; a man not accepted by the ‘crowds’, a man ostracized, but a man who wanted to know Truth and experience liberty (John 8:32-36).

For Zacchaeus (as for all those who seek Him) God provides a way. One must, as Zacchaeus did, **get above the crowd, get up higher** to see the Christ, and it’s in that place that one begins to perceive a little of God’s panoramic view; the view that puts *consensus* in its proper perspective and a view that reveals the terrible reality of worldly paradigm. Zacchaeus was seen by the Christ and invited to sup with Him - an invitation that he accepted. By so doing, he distinguished himself from the ‘crowd’. Consensus does not praise – it usually ridicules that. When he climbed down from the tree, he engaged **the Reality** and he was able to ‘pass through’ that once formidable and impenetrable crowd. It took *perseverance* to find the way to Jesus, but Jesus always calls to it and empowers one to break through.





Discovery Point: *(Reflect and discuss this crowd of consensus and your personal experiences with it at work, home or club. Share with the group how you are or have struggled with this and how God may have led you to deal with this crowd.)*

Section four: The Crowd of Circumstance

(Read Mark 5: 21-43)

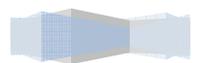
Meeting with this crowd is not merely cyclic - it is also inevitable. It is the crowd most readily overcome by an immovable focus on Jesus and strong character. This crowd will not so much prevent us receiving from our Mighty Lord (although it can), but, if it prevails, it does invariably prevent us from knowing God's best!

Mark's account opens with Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, coming and falling at Jesus' feet and beseeching the Christ to come and lay hands on his sick and dying daughter.



Discovery Point: *(Reflect and discuss Jairus' status and the implications of this purported shameless action. Discuss also - How does a crisis impact your motivation and methodology of seeking God?)*

Jairus was distraught (as I am sure most of us would be given the same situation) at the pending fate of his little girl. A new priority had entered his world, his daughter's demise, consequently the previously prized priority of reputation and status pale to insignificance.



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There was despair, fear, anxiety and frustration; but as compassionate as the Christ is, it is not to these that He responds. These emotional states on their own signify lack of confidence, relationship, and trust and often suggest that Jesus is a last resort, an, ‘Oh well, we’ve tried everything else. We could try God, see what He can do!’ or ‘Well God, if You’re out there You’d better do something’. However, our Lord will always look beyond or into the midst of these to see if there is any desire *to enact the faith* He has already given. The evidence of its ignition is all the Master looks for, even in the midst of doubt and fear.

Faith was ignited by the shameless plea for help. Jesus consented to the request and, as He went, a great multitude *thronged* Him; they hemmed Him in and jostled Him. This crowd gives *no space* and can prove very claustrophobic. Progress to Jairus’ home was slow, and for Jairus it must have been torturously so.

Then in the midst of this jostling crowd came yet another impediment - a woman suffering from an internal disorder causing a flow of blood. Scripture records that she had suffered this affliction for many years and had suffered much at the hands of physicians and had sought cure to the point of poverty. She was a woman very sick and very weak, but a woman of **focus, confession, expectation and perseverance**. She pressed through the crushing crowd with the declaration, “*If only I touch His garment, I will be well.*”

Not only did this woman have the throng to contend with, she had her own more intimidating crowd. She suffered from an ‘issue of blood’; in other words she was suffering something like permanent menstruation. It was not lawful for a Jewish woman to even be in public during her cycle. On top of that here severe anaemia would have been even more debilitating. She would have needed to exert every last ounce of energy to penetrate the crowd around her...but she does! **Faith in Him will always help you penetrate where it seems almost impossible to do so**. She reached out, touched Jesus’ garment and sensed in her body that she was made whole.

I want to digress here for one moment – It’s interesting to note Jesus perceived power had gone from Him, and all indications in the account we have before us, is it did so without His willing knowledge or consent. This is evident by the intense question, “Who touched me?” I don’t believe it was a panicky, anxious or disapproving question, rather more a delightful, but very real surprised response.

God seemingly surprised! Don’t see many indications of that very often... or do we?

Maybe it’s not something we see, because there is so little in us that surprises God – I understand God is omniscient, but there is something that is (though possible) improbable in this fallen creation, a probability that diminishes with each more sinful, rebellious, obstinate and self worshipping generation. This improbability that man, for whatever reason, will abandon self, embrace the possibility of faith, but not in some formulaic hyper-faith manner, is very slim. Not only that, but the probability that this fallen man will recklessly abandon himself to humbly ‘bet it all or lose my life’ expectation in the Only One who can deliver, makes the ‘odds’ (so to speak) even less. Yet it is these very qualities this desperately anaemic woman exhibited. There were others – the Centurion in Matthew chapter 8 – the Syro-phoenecian woman with the demon-possessed daughter had it also. An audacity that wasn’t based on pride, selfishness or positive thinking – rather the audacity to believe in, cling to, rely upon, and unwaveringly

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trust this One and only this One, to meet the need. All these instances exacted amazement from the Master, but in the most gratifying way.

Ah, but what of the sick woman’s quiet access to power? With the former examples there was request and dialogue, yet with the woman in this thronging crowd there was though silent – an unrelenting, expectation and assuredness that, ‘If only I touch His garment!’ From my perspective it is almost as if this divine resource – this power that is intrinsically in and with God is predisposed to attraction to this holy posture, like lightning conducting to a lightning rod.. I would like to suggest that heaven favours this attraction, this heart, this expectation – and does so joyfully!

Whose side is God on - the poor, frail and broken or the rich, powerful and strong? Neither, He is looking to see who will be on His side, He is looking for faith. Just as Joshua experienced in Joshua chapter 5, Jesus is Lord and He looks for faith and is attracted to it.

The woman heard and understood the Master’s fervent and repeated question, ‘Who touched me?’ Yet those supposed to be most familiar with Jesus couldn’t grasp the context of the question. The awe filled woman (not scared, the scared always run) presented to disclose her sad journey and its victorious culmination. Now I want you to note how she came to the Lord, with fear and trembling! So many were ‘touching’ Jesus, but had no idea what or who they were touching. This woman knew, not only the awesome power, but understood who it was that dispensed it. This woman’s touch was a ‘connection’, an engaging on another level. This is evidence of the true heart of faith – yes reckless abandon, bold, expectant and ‘lay it all down’ kind of faith – but far more. This faith was also worshipful (that’s what awe does) humble, not familiar. Not wanting to make a ‘big deal’ or try and simply be part of the ‘crowd of consensus’, the latest teaching, fad, flavour, fashion or formula (by the way the four ‘F’ words of Christianity). Rather this one was broken, desperate, yet fully convinced of the ability and capacity of this unique one from God.

Jesus acknowledges her and blesses her publicly, and this too was significant. Jesus not only restores this woman’s body, but makes her whole. He, before all watching, including at least one leader of the synagogue, validates her as physically whole, and restores her worth as a human being and even more. Jesus lauds her faith and lifts this once sick and socially reprobate woman to the status of daughter of the Kingdom – she was on His side.

A digression if I may? A problem arises with faith when it becomes mechanised and result focused only. That faith revolves around the first set of criteria mentioned in section one; ambitious, expecting, confessing, whatever it takes to get the result. I like to call this the ‘mind of faith’. It is necessary, but alone will eventually cause untold eternal grief. For me, it is the ‘heart of faith’ that is paramount. The humble, patient, determined, worshipful and awe-satiated expectation that surprises Heaven is like a magnet to God’s power. You can’t ‘beat this up’ or ‘put this on’. It is almost invariably induced by complete brokenness and subsequent Godly humility, harnessed to a longing for intimacy with Him. It is these the Psalmist declares that God delights in (Psalm 51). Also, it is these that will prevent us being casualties of our own formula, ambition or vanity. It will ensure we cast out demons, heal the sick and do signs in His name and remain as those KNOWN BY HIM. (Matthew 7: 21-23)

Okay, back to the story! At this point Jairus could have viewed, examined and contemplated the events and been encouraged at seeing the power of God flow to this needy woman, and so been inspired by the faith of this woman who had braved great odds to receive



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her healing, inspiring *faith unto faith!* But it is always difficult to see possibility even in the miraculous when we are so gripped by our own perspective and predicament. The news came “Your daughter is dead! Bother the Teacher no more.” How often does the circumstance reach the seemingly unalterable, and as a result we capitulate even when we know that Jesus is on His way to fulfil His Word!

The gracious Christ exhorted Jairus, in verse 36, “Do not be afraid, and only believe” (trust Me in spite of what the circumstances present). Jesus then dispelled the crowd and permitted only the intimates to go with Him (those tenaciously hungering for the fullness of Christ), thereby ridding the area of cynicism and scorn from the sceptical and faithless mourners (those who reinforce death).

Jesus then reversed the irreversible and raised that little girl from the dead.



Discovery Point: *(Reflect: Share and discuss those circumstances that have overcome you and the ones you have overcome, and discuss what factors made the difference in your experience.)*

Section Five: The Crowd of Principalities and Powers

(Read Mark 10: 46-52)

This crowd not only creates a clamour, it is considerably more insistent than the others are. Worse, it intimidates and can be frighteningly aggressive to the one who has not yet experientially grasped the authority that maturity in faith-fullness in our God will bring.

Bartimaeus was a blind beggar, bereft of physical sight and because of his inability to see, socially demeaned. Because he didn't have worth (not able to contribute profitably to the community) he was discarded, just short of being ostracized and very much like the woman in the previous account. It is important to note that Bartimaeus' physical and social status is a type of our spiritual state outside of Christ.



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Jesus was again en route. He was **passing by**. On hearing that the Christ was approaching, the crowd began to gather. Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by and began to **cry out**.

Did he cry “Teacher,” “Rabbi!” or “Prophet?” No! His cry was specific. His **focus** was clear and his **confession** strong. He called out, “*Jesus, Son of David. Have mercy on me.*” The man **knew** to Whom he was calling; he had a prophetic revelation of the Son of God.

Then the crowd warned him to be quiet; (much like the crowd of rulers of wickedness) they attempted to silence him (and those who call out to the Christ) “Shut up...speak no more.” Did this innocuous beggar cease? No, he cried out all the more! Even though this man was ‘discounted’ by the culture and essentially disenfranchised, he did not look to the crowd that had labelled him and was attempting to silence him. He looked to Jesus! In the throng, Jesus did not hear the crowd calling out, but He did hear the *distinct cry of faith*. (Much like the woman’s ‘touch’ in Mark 5, when so many were making contact with Him it was the distinct touch of Faith that impacted the Christ. Smith Wigglesworth said, ‘There is something about believing God that will cause Him to pass over a thousand people just to anoint you.’)

How did the benevolent Son of Love respond? He simply stood still in the road. He didn’t feverously run over to Bartimaeus, but simply commanded that he be brought over. The scripture notably recounts how Bartimaeus discarded the mantle that was representative of all he had been or was perceived to be. This act could be interpreted as a public declaration and confession of his expectation that this will no longer be his portion. From this junction forward, the Jesus Factor would transform his life and circumstances.

It is interesting that this crowd of principalities and powers, upon the command of Jesus, stops its intimidating and censoring mode and in an almost patronizing manner, informs Bartimaeus that the Christ is responding, as if to distract with yet another deceptive tactic. However, even this is to no avail as Bartimaeus had **fixed his spiritual gaze on Jesus**.

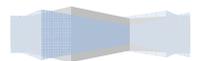
Upon being presented to Jesus in the middle of the road, in full view of this crowd, Jesus asked the blind man a seemingly absurd question, “*What do you want from me?*” A man blind from birth presents anyone with an obvious state of disability. Yet, the omniscient Christ asks what is plainly obvious.



Discovery Point: (*Reflect and discuss why you think Jesus asked this question?*)

Did Bartimaeus reply cynically, as perhaps many would along the lines of “Well what do you think? Isn’t that obvious? Can’t you **see**?” No! Bartimaeus’ request is not only prepared but also specific. “That I may see!” is shamelessly cried out in the presence of this Crowd.

Note too that Jesus, in a very matter of fact manner, healed this once permanently blind man and gave an interesting command... “Go your way” to which Bartimaeus unreservedly responded by following Jesus down the road. In this crowd, Bartimaeus’ **focus** was not on the extension of God (His ability to heal), but nothing less that **the Christ Himself**.





Discovery Point: (*Reflect: Again discuss this crowd and your experiences with it, both good and bad. What were your victories? What do you need victory in? What can the group do?*)

Section six:

The Crowd of the Church Perceived

This crowd can often be the last and, at times, most devastating, not because of its aggressive domination or strength, but because, for the most part, it is unexpected, and in that vulnerability it often measures the greatest impact.

(Reflect and read Mark 2: 1-12 and Luke 5:17)

This account opened with what was becoming a typical scenario for our Lord. He had entered a city and in due course the knowledge of His presence had spread and crowds had begun to gather. Mark records that the gathering became so large “*that there was no longer room to receive them.*” Luke tells of what this crowd consisted. It was the Pharisees and teachers of the Law who were sitting closest to Jesus, having come from every town of Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem. It is vital to note that Luke 5:17 records, “*And the power of the Lord was present to heal them.*” It becomes evident later in both accounts that those Pharisees had not presented themselves to assist, receive or even allow healing to take place, even though that was a specific facet of the occasion. They had come to contend with the Master.

Four men had brought a paralysed man on a bed but they could not gain access to Christ for healing **because of the crowd**. This particular crowd is engrossed in debate and contentions about the Kingdom rather than *understanding the wisdom and manifestation of it*. If they had understood, they would have allowed the paralytic access to the Christ.

This event can illustrate that we must have **our focus on Jesus**, not just His will and purpose, but more importantly, **His character and nature**. If our faith focus is misplaced and we believe for the wrong or inappropriate thing, then it will become evident in our circumstances. But if Christ is truly our focus then a solution will eventuate.



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This paralytic man and the four friends who bore him came to the house, but couldn't get in. Now, this house, though common, would have been of reasonable size. The 'room' in which Jesus was sitting would have been the main room of the house, but to get to that room you would have an entrance way from the street. This portico was not a straight line, rather a dog leg, so people on the street couldn't simply look into the most private places of the home if an external door was open. So we have the room filled, passage filled and the door way filled. These gentleman had no chance of getting through this crowd... after all, those seated were there first and they didn't want to 'give up' their position in trying to view what may come next.

This particular crowd.

For the purpose of this section I want to categorise into groups the people in this house. All had a 'religious' reason for being there.

- a) **The Suspicious and cynical Spectator** – They came to debate tradition over truth, process over power, political correctness over compassion and are motivated by Pride, and the protection of Power, Position and Privilege. **These souls are the crowd of the Church Perceived, not real – and in this setting they take the prominent place (in line with their core ambitious motives). They minimise space where the greatest proximity is needed and marginalise those trying to approach.**
- b) **The Sampling Spectator** – They come to see what might happen. What will this revolutionary do? Will He do some tricks, upset the rulers of the people and give us something more to talk about? Their commitment goes as far as their sense of personal cost will permit them. This spectator clutter is not as malicious as the first, but in their clamour to 'rubber neck' they add to the blockage and only increase the impediment for those who truly need to be close to Jesus.
- c) **The Seeker** - The seeker is interested in the Truth, not mere feelings. Interested in what is the right, not just what suits them. These souls know what they want and why. They understand Who it is that can provide this and pursues Him relentlessly.

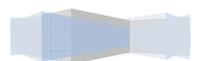
It is our paralytic friend and his four companions who are seekers. The crowd does not stop the seeker!

Some Key points

- a) Focus + perseverance + belief of the candidate and his friends = Faith, but not only on what, but more importantly who!
- b) Obstacles + barriers + enemies = Crowd

These men had just such a focus; they wanted to get to Jesus even though this crowd had denied access. Their determination and perseverance to reach the Christ enabled them to find another way.

“Roof (âbþ, gagh; óôÝãç, steñgeô).—these were flat. Compare “The beams of our house are cedars, and our rafters are firs” (Song 1:17). To get over the difficulty of the larger spans, a common practice was to introduce a main beam (kÕuôraôh) carried on the walls and strengthened by one or more intermediate posts let into stone sockets laid on the floor. Smaller timbers as joists (“rafters,” raôhÖœôtÖ) were spaced out and covered in turn with brushwood; the final covering, being of mud mixed with chopped straw, was beaten and rolled. A tiny stone roller is found on every modern native roof, and is used



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to roll the mud into greater solidity every year on the advent of the first rains. Similar rollers have been found among the ancient remains throughout the country; see *Excavations of Gezer*, I, 190; PEFS, Warren's letters, 46. "They let him down through the tiles (êYñáiïò, keñramos) with his couch into the midst before Jesus" (Luke 5:19) refers to the breaking through of a roof similar to this. The roof ("housetop," gagh; äŞiá, doñma) was an important part of every house and was subjected to many uses. It was used for worship (2 Kings 23:12; Jeremiah 19:13; Jeremiah 32:29; Zeph. 1:5; Acts 10:9). Absalom spread his tent on the "top of the house" (2 Samuel 16:22). In the Feast of the Tabernacles temporary booths (sÖukkaôh) were erected on the housetops. The people, as is their habit today, gathered together on the roof as a common meeting-place on high days and holidays (Judges 16:27). The wild wranglings which can be heard in any modern native village, resulting in vile accusations and exposure of family secrets hurled from the housetops of the conflicting parties, illustrate the passage, "And what ye have spoken in the ear in the inner chambers shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke 12:3)." 2

In short the roof top can be used for a...

- a) Meeting place
- b) Place for Prayer and worship.
- c) Waiting chamber for the bride
- d) Place of rest and quiet
- e) Private place 3

Understand this space – the roof – is very much, if not sacred, very personal space. The social intrusion they are about to perpetrate is a big enough insult in itself let alone what will follow, the destruction of that space.

This roof at best may have had a small tiled opening trap door they would have had to make bigger to lower the man down on this mat. At the worst the exercise would have been a major structural excavation, as this roof had to be heavy rolled and compacted, almost like cement. But it was to whom they were going to meet that mattered most. This was the place of SOZO (Greek) - the place of salvation - healing, deliverance and wholeness, in fact what the 'church' was meant to be.

EXIT STRATEGIES

It's important to note the Seeker has NO EXIT STRATEGY. The true seeker of God, not the sampler, only needs to find a way in, they don't need to devise a way out.

What do we do when we approach God? Do we come to God with a genuine request or need that we honestly believe is in accordance with His will in faith, yet worry that our prayer may not be answered?

Often these 'anxieties' are little more than nagging doubts that we try to cognitively dismiss, but there is a little more behind this. There is often a fear of 'collateral damage' that may arise from an unanswered prayer, and that fear is an existential crisis known as the erosion of hope.

In the case of unanswered prayer, our perhaps struggling psyche often seeks to craft an 'exit theology', a well thought through (at least to our mind) and reasonable explanation as to the advent of unanswered prayer. But it's this exit strategy that can be a very real blockage



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to our way in, just like the crowds confronting the men in Mark chapter 2. Often these exit theologies are an attempt to avoid the existential crisis that may precipitate a ‘loss of peace and well being’, or even the fear of making a spectacle of ourselves and being mocked or labeled. After all much of our cultural Christianity (not relational) is about a worldview that helps me anchor hope and find the sense, order and framework that I can hang my feelings on to keep them safe. In this space my Christian faith becomes simply cathartic and as John Wesley put it... ‘Mere mental assent’!

Am I suggesting this is a bad thing, not in its own right, especially when my feelings are of paramount importance. However, when it comes to transcending the realm of emotional catharsis and mental assent, then our clamour to hold ‘our peace’ (not His) will mean we sabotage faith before it can find ‘the way in’, and while we are stepping out in hope that something ‘good’ will happen were are inadvertently believing it wont and unbelief wins.

These men seem to ‘burn bridges’ finding a way in, they created offence...

- a) Religious offence – they literally ‘crashed’ a Rabbi’s teaching session.
- b) Cultural offence – They entered unannounced and unceremoniously.
- c) Social offence – In essence they invaded and violated very private social space.

Did these men do this because they were insensitive to these realities or worse didn’t care for them? Every Jewish boy would know these protocols and practices are important. Was it then because they were simply rude, discourteous or worse, rebellious... again no, there was something much bigger at play here.

These men had a higher focus, attitude and commitment, they knew...

- a) What the need was.
- b) Where they must go.
- c) Who Jesus really was.

Faith didn’t discount or ignore the cultural, social or even ‘religious’ protocols and nuances, it **transcended** them. This life controlling and debilitating problem was not going to be resolved by culture, only by the supra-cultural. So to rise above culture are we prepared to burn bridges, or are we still wanting to salvage our cultural ‘esteem’?

This is evidenced by the responses recorded in Mark’s Gospel. No one was saying... “Hey what about my roof? How dare you interrupt this meeting? Who are you to violate our privacy?” NO! Instead they were ALL amazed and exclaimed... “Nothing like this has ever happened before.”

There is nothing, and I do mean NOTHING, quite like a miraculous event to shift culture. In our relativistic society, it is culture – both personal and collective – that is being prized, even deified above all else. It is in this space that world-view, values and belief systems are constructed and often ruthlessly defended. To shift this paradigm requires Truth and its demonstration on all levels. A supernaturally devoid Gospel is stripped of much of its strength to collapse, construct, convict and convert precious persons caught in culture.

These gentlemen were undeterred, all they knew was that, despite the obstacles that appear to be, all they had to do is get to Jesus. Faith in this instance wasn’t cultivated in a single moment. It wasn’t just the reliance on a ‘special anointing’, these men, all four of them, had ...



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- a) Prepared - They found out the itinerary of the Rabbi and made a bed to take the paralytic to Him.
- b) Picked up - Not only their colleague, but the principle of bearing one another’s burdens and serving the poor and marginalised.
- c) Pursued - They chased after the one who would heal.
- d) Persevered – They did not cease until they were at the feet of Jesus.

The Man is forgiven

Jesus immediate recorded response to this ‘demonstration’ of belief (He responded to their perseverance (James 2:14)) was to declare this mans sins forgiven Mark 2:5, “**When Jesus saw their FAITH, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’.**” Time and context will not permit me to fully exegete these words, but suffice to say in Marks context it is about the ‘right and power’ of this MAN God to do what no other authority can claim. Jesus is sovereign, and his deity is demonstrated in both the absolution and restoration. These two outcomes, forgiveness and healing are synonymous with one another. Jesus wanted the crowd to understand both as imperative. Jesus Gospel was one of wholeness, redemption and relationship, not merely status, performance and function.

Now the man, on Jesus command, gets up and easily makes his way through the crowd. He exits the place (one of the initial key impediments) because Jesus has now granted him the means to do so.

Once you find your way in to Jesus, He will provide the way ‘out’ for you.



Discovery Point: *(Reflect and discuss: As sensitively and objectively as you can, discuss your difficulties/experiences or wrestling with this crowd; how it has affected you. Share and discuss some of the ‘exit strategies’ you may have. Also, if you dare, share some of the selfishness, pride, indifference and cynicism both in you and those of this crowd and what may have brought you to these states)*



Section seven: *The Grave Mentality*



Discovery Point: *(Pause and read John 3:11-12 and 1 John 1:1-4. Briefly discuss the qualifications of a ‘WITNESS’.)*

Luke 24:5 “...*why do you seek the living among the dead?*” (What are you doing here? You should know better than to be here!)

What I call the ‘grave mentality’ is in my opinion the last great hurdle of Faith, a hurdle that, historically, few have surmounted. (But it is vital to know that One, who most needed to, **did**, and ultimately that is sufficient for humanity).

It is not only in the face of death that this mentality is so overwhelming; it works and creates a sense of impasse in many instances. This mentality was never more evident than in the disciples after Calvary. The followers of Jesus had moved into an ‘obliteration’ mindset. Even the repeated statements of the Christ Himself concerning the coming events and the exclamation that He would die and rise again, were not sufficient to circumvent this overwhelming state of mind.

(Pause and read Luke 23:56-24:1)

The women had come to the tomb with spices and prepared embalming ointment designed for one purpose only - to preserve the state of a lifeless body (there is another big lesson we could launch into here...another day perhaps!). They had resigned themselves to the maintenance of a memory; the continued maintenance of things holding the form of what was once treasured, but with no life, movement or function. They had gone to the tomb totally prepared for death. So often, we are sorrowful of, or even warm to, the esteemed memory of an ‘example man’ – a dead good person, rather than communing with **the living Christ**,

This same mindset existed at Bethany.

Let us digress, again, and Read John 11: 1-44. As you have read, Jesus, upon request, said He would go to heal Lazarus, but He waited and, it seemed to most, not for the better but for the worse. Jesus knew in His Spirit when had Lazarus had died, and He said, “Lazarus sleeps”, to which the disciples replied “Good. Then he will recover.” Jesus had to make it plain - Lazarus was **dead**. *(The statement Christ made in reference to sleep was a direct indication of the total powerlessness of death when the Jesus factor is completely in control. Jesus always spoke and acted from the Divine perspective; to Jesus Lazarus was just asleep.)*

Regardless of these powerful words of faith and His expressed determination to go to Lazarus to heal him (even under threat of death), and despite the fact that the disciples had seen Jesus raise the woman’s son at Nain (Luke 7) and Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5) even having witnessed this all before – the disciples could only see the grave and its obliteration. This was made evident by Thomas’ comment “*let us also go, that we may die with Him.*”

Upon arriving at Bethany Jesus had to immediately address one of those very sad ‘**if**’ statements of implied blame. “If You had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus promised that Lazarus would rise again. Martha responded in verse 24, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” A bold statement – she could know for thousands to



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rise in the future, but even so could not believe for the present, and I believe this is indicative of our focus, again revealing the difference between faith and hope. Jesus lovingly declared, “ I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” Then He asked, “Do you believe this?” I would like to submit that Jesus was saying, “If you can only believe this, it will be sufficient.” Martha replied, and again I believe this is what Jesus wanted her to confess, “Yes Lord (I do believe), I believe You are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world.”

Jesus then asked to be taken to Lazarus and for the tomb to be opened (signifying an unlocking) but they continued to sprout unbelief –“He’s been dead for four days, he’ll stink.” Christ then demonstrates the utter powerlessness of death when He is in control; He called Lazarus back from the dead.

What I find of great comfort in all this is that Jesus was not undermined, offended or deterred by the unbelief He encountered. These examples both inspire me and let me ‘breath’ as it were, when I find myself wrestling with aggressive doubt that boards on unbelief. I like the fact that Jesus didn’t get ‘grieved’ and run away saying “Well you don’t believe I can do this so I’ll withdraw and allow this circumstance and the enemy of your souls to run you over”.

However, even all this documented historical fact, witnessed by the disciples, and the several times Jesus clearly stated He would die and rise again from the dead, (Mark 10:33-34, Luke 9:22) was not enough to defeat the ‘grave mentality’ in His disciples experience.



Discovery Point: (*Share and discuss the miracles you’ve experienced.*

What were the circumstances? How were you feeling - strong, discouraged, fearful etc? Why do you think doubt still manages to affect us about the miraculous, even when we know God has clearly performed them?)

John 20:9 states, “As yet they didn’t understand the Scripture, which He must die and rise again from the dead.” That is precisely it! The ‘grave mentality’ does not perceive the very real possibilities in God’s supernatural power. However, dare I write, it does not stop there - it gets worse! (Read John 20:1 – 18)

Mary had seen the tomb empty and thought with utter despair that Jesus’ body had been stolen (not resurrected). She had been robbed of brooding over the carcass (how morbid)! Then Jesus Himself spoke to her and she did *not even recognise Him!* That is how all consuming this state is; it blinds naturally and spiritually, it depresses, grieves, breeds



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hopelessness and discouragement, it can develop cynicism and ultimately it denies the supernatural dynamic of God.

It is in this very situation where Jesus Himself demonstrated why *we need the community of the faithful to enable us to sustain faith*. He did not berate or even rebuke her; He simply *whispered her name*. *When the grave mentality engulfs us we need those around us who will whisper His name and touch us personally with the hope of heaven that we may again reconnect with the faith that has never left us*, but which we lost sight of in this blind oppression of defeat.

(Pause and read Luke 24: 6-12)

When convinced that Jesus had risen indeed Mary ran with great haste to tell the disciples. Note verse 11 – the inconceivable is done by those ‘mighty apostles of faith’ - “*and it seemed to them as idle tales*”. These men had spent three, solid years with the Christ of God and had seen His unprecedented love and power. He had plainly declared to them Who He was, precisely why He came and what He was to do (three major anchor points); yet disbelief was all they could manage. Again, I find encouragement that even those so close to the Master were swayed so convincingly by this mindset, and although disconcerting, it was not irremediable.

(Pause: Read and discuss Luke 24:13-22 in the light of the above)

As stated earlier, this grave mentality does not revolve specifically around death in the physical sense, but presents the notion of the irretrievable, beyond the possible. Such a manifestation is found in Acts 12:1-16. This is now post-Pentecost and the disciples had been ‘endued with power from on high’. The persecution of the church had started (something Australia has not experienced...yet!). Peter was in prison, and it is recorded that the disciples were behind locked doors praying for him. An angel appeared to Peter and liberated him from the prison and he made his way to the home of those praying, and knocked on the door. A young lady by the name of Rhoda heard it was Peter and in her excitement rushed to tell the others, leaving Peter outside. Even with the insisting testimony of one of their own, their response was, verse 15, “You are beside yourself...it is his angel”.

My question is...what had they been praying for and why?





Discovery Point: (*Discuss the aspects of ATTITUDE in regard to faith.*

Share incidents when you've been praying and surprised at what has eventuated).

This mentality is the progeny of an incessant conditioning process, facilitated by the enemy of your soul, using worldly consensus together with our frail flesh and its carnality in an attempt to discourage and dissipate the saint of God. It is a condition, I must say, that our Gracious Lord does understand, as evident in His merciful responses, but it is a condition He tirelessly works toward overcoming in us, by progressively forming His Character in our lives.

Conclusion

In an era of unprecedented focus on success, the ever-diminishing opportunities for its attainment and an increasing stigma associated with failure, there has been a need to generate what the Christless society calls “good mental health”. Attempts to facilitate this have been made by optimism, positive self-affirmation and self-focused internal motivational dialogue. Because the aim of such processes is not the furtherance of society (socially, emotionally or spiritually) but rather the ephemeral and egocentric ‘success’ of material acquisition, suffice to say, such dialogue is, at best, superficial.

Learned optimism and good sense of self are needed and are beneficial, granted. But the resources of self are quickly and easily spent in a social/spiritual climate of great and increasing demands. The first casualties of such pressures are those purported qualities and abilities that have no foundation in character. The writer of ‘Proverbs’ declares, “He who faints in the day of adversity, his strength is small”.

The emphasis that society has placed on the superficial, the quick and the temporal has tragically infiltrated the mindset of the Church. We have seen and heard the emphasis on confession and expectation alone, but this at the expense of **priority and focus**, and with even less attention to **commitment** and it has been to the church’s peril to do so.

The God of perpetuity knows and has purposed that eternity is our portion and the portion of His Creation, and it is the Character of Christ and His Character alone that is needed.

Our sinless Lord, with the resources of heaven – grace, power and love – ministered consistently, dynamically, and with perfect integrity, the will, purpose and life of His Father’s Kingdom. His authority is unparalleled, His wisdom greater than Solomon’s. Yet it was



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ultimately none of these things that would sustain Him; it was none of these things that would quickly facilitate with certainty the things Christ must do.

To complete His heaven-given task, to undertake the single most important aspect of His ministry for humanity, required nothing less than the **Character of His God** and the strength and overcoming endurance that that brings. At no other time than from Gethsemane to Golgotha was our precious Lord so taxed, so demanded upon, so tormented and so besieged by the enemy, flesh and the world. I believe it was Character, the quality of Faith and Faithfulness, in conjunction with the other aspects of God’s character that enabled Him “to endure the cross, despise the shame, and to sit down at the right hand of the Father.”

There was no greater anguish than when Jesus uttered two statements, one at Gethsemane, “if this cup can pass by me”, and the other at Calvary when he cried, “My God, My God why have You forsaken Me.” No greater temptation or opportunity to exempt Him from the process of sacrifice was presented than at those times. It was only His total trust in His Father, and **the perseverance, loyalty, focus, expectation, priority** and **confession** that these bring, that saw Him bear up until fulfilment of His task.

I am compelled to state again that it is for times of struggle, affliction and temptation that our God wants to firmly instil His Character attributes in those who call upon the Name of the Lord. We are His hands and His feet that we may be the vessels He wants us to be, that we may not merely survive but conquer and overcome, completing that which we are called to do – bearing our Cross (the task heaven requires of us) until we are called home, or our Mighty Lord returns. It is only with His love, power and character that this will be done.

SELAH! Shane.

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Study Guide for Leaders

“My people have gone into captivity because they have no knowledge.”

(Isaiah 5:13)

There are many styles of writing and similarly there are myriads of tastes among an audience. Styles reflect many things about the author (and reader). Also, style can be used as a tool to generate a specific response, and with this in mind, I want us to look at the following.

Background

Christianity is a learned religion, and the way in which it is learned is imperative. Jesus stated in Matthew 11:28 that we are to take His yoke upon us and learn from Him. Interestingly enough, that command is of very little benefit if we simply employ a classroom model for the learning.

In interpreting that command the first instruction given to us is often neglected, that is to **take His yoke upon us...then** to learn. The priority is the ‘harnessing’ and then comes the subsequent progression, with Jesus, through discipleship. It becomes abundantly obvious that the learning process employed here far exceeds a passive tutorial style (although that is part of it), but very clearly requires the active participation, that is **doing!**

Christianity is not simply an event. It is a process, **and salvation is more a consequence than just an event.** It is a progressively developing kaleidoscope of seeing, hearing, understanding, implementing, demonstrating and, most importantly, being!

The experiential learning evident in the disciple-making mandate embraces the models of *parenting* and *apprenticing*. It is the consequence of the relationship that the Creator had purposed for His creation. That relationship transcends the idea of the collective and even community, and speaks more of *family*. The connection is as vital on the horizontal as it is on the vertical. In fact **any neglect of, or failure to fully develop interpersonal “horizontal” relationships abrogates any chance of achieving wholeness.** God, in His wisdom, has created us for fellowship with Him and with each other. It is in our interactive, progressively developing and comprehensive relationships with each other that we experience a greater understanding and manifestation of God.

Modernity (the modernising process) and its secularising (becoming more like the world) influence has meant that the ‘culture’ of biblical family has been seriously eroded. Even its lesser though just as important facsimile, community, has been inadvertently downgraded, even omitted. Suffice to say, this hinders God’s intention to bring a dynamic expression of Himself through His united Body. (Ephesians 2:20-22, 4:16).

What, pray tell, has this to do with “Help I need a real Faith”? I am so glad you asked!

Types and Styles

In much of its activity in western culture specifically Christianity has become ‘event’, ‘gift’ or ‘platform’ oriented. This has meant a discounting (unintentional as it may be) of the individual saint and their relationship, role and experience. The format of this study series attempts to counteract some of the ‘passive spectator/consumer’ type mentality that the previously mentioned orientation has produced.



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There are a couple basic learning processes - deductive and inductive. The former is designed to lead your group to a specific conclusion and so it has a clear point in mind. By its very framework, this way of learning sets clear guidelines and limits debate, and is a reasonable and acceptable style to use to disseminate information.

The inductive style involves learning via an exploration or an investigation, where people are encouraged to arrive at the correct conclusions in their own way.

The other term I want to use here is *‘interactive’* which means a style that allows room enough for people to *share their experiences and understandings with each other whilst maintaining subject integrity.*

In the ‘mosaic’ rather than ‘linear’ approach of these publications, it is my intention to facilitate interaction and to motivate people to open up and share transparently and to relate with integrity. Ultimately, it is to have individuals identify with each other. The principles and teachings presented achieve their point by having people minister to each other and *apply* that which they have studied. This causes the participants to contribute to and receive from one another. In a small way, this will aid the development of the community that is so desperately needed if we as a church are going to begin to experience a greater dynamic of God’s heart. So there are three steps involved– 1) **study**, 2) **discovery** 3) **application!**

The Studies

These studies are the result of personal illumination and experience together with a concern for a rising incidence of public sin and Biblical compromise in the Body of Christ, particularly amongst leadership. Sin is like an iceberg and the public sin is only the tip, making the hidden sin extensive. This sin is often unaddressed due to a lack of real, caring community. Instead we often have ‘structures’ masquerading as community, but reliant on investigation, legislation and arbitration rather than love, consolation and discipline-based discipleship. True discipleship has trouble developing in an ‘elitist culture’ that states you have to be seen to be in control (whether you are or not), and particularly that leaders must always present as ‘unreal icons’ of purported virtue. Thankfully, the **God who is preoccupied with genuineness will tolerate no facade**, no matter how noble, **and is concerned with authenticity in character, word and deed far more than ministry and gifting.**

This series is obviously not exhaustive in the topics presented. It leaves ample room for individual pursuit and is very much a catalyst for exploration. The studies can be undertaken in any order, but *“Help I need a real Holiness”* can give a sense of preparation if used first because it deals with our separation from the world and the type of difficulties that may be encountered in that.

When using the material it is important to read all the Scriptures referred to, taking the time to **examine** each one. The ‘Pause/Discuss’ interludes are self-explanatory, but I will reiterate again that you, the leader, should allow ample time for sharing, contribution and exploration. Going on tangents often brings out the heart of people and the studies will not lose their integrity in the process, so you will not need to tightly hold the reins. In fact, it will be fulfilling one of the primary objectives if interactive dialogue and ministering to one another takes place. We want people to learn not only from the studies but also from each other



What is the best way to present the study?

One can simply launch into the study and see what arises, which can be good for simply a mutual journey of discovery. However, if you have time constraints or a specific destination, learning/action outcome in mind, then these studies can be used very effectively to do just that.

Some of the passages of scripture can be quite long. I want to bring your attention to one such passage in “*Help I need a real Holiness*” (subtitle ‘History’) as an example. The verses of scripture given here need to be read to familiarise the participants with the events and circumstances preceding the extrication of the Israelites from Egypt. Obviously, to read these out during ‘cell’ time would detract from the gathering. Therefore, I suggest that the leader requests the participants to do some preparatory reading in the week before studying this particular section. Then at the beginning of group time, you can ask for a brief synopsis of events in these passages (of course, this principle applies in all study preparation).

The study has been segmented into seven sections that may be looked at as separate studies. If you wish you can spend an evening on each section, however I believe as you really allow exploration and discussion to flow you could spend up to 3 evenings on each section. Again, that will depend on the group and time constraints.

Leadership

Requirements for leadership in these studies are simple yet important. The leader must:

- ✓ Be ‘an open book’, walking with honesty and authenticity (not sinless perfection).
- ✓ Desire to see real community develop in your cell/small group – use the studies to develop mutual sensitivity, vulnerability and care.
- ✓ Have a demonstrated ability to *facilitate* discussion, **not** to lecture or control, and be able to guide the study so that it explores the particular character/attribute in focus. This should challenge and provoke the group in a way that does not detrimentally affect an individual or the group as a whole.
- ✓ Be adept in exercising wise and gracious rectification processes if interaction moves out of the edification ethos and into unrealistic expectations, accusation or insensitive or potentially abusive behaviour.
- ✓ Be someone ‘apt to teach’, which means one who is well acquainted with God’s Word and who has a good grasp of facilitating group discussion.
- ✓ Be very sensitive to the Holy Ghost’s leading and the group dynamic. Always be prepared and seek for the Spirit of God to convict, challenge, encourage and restore. Small groups are a great place for accountability, healing, growth, deliverance and gift expression.
- ✓ Be able to facilitate an authentic application process of things learned. Discipleship is about implementation and accountability as much as it is about understanding. **Please remember, study, discovery and application are not so much about productivity and performance, they are much more about priority and potential.**
- ✓ Do not let the small group stagnate through inertia or ‘mutate’ through exclusivity or over introspection. Always maintain an environment of genuine transparency, confidentiality and intimacy, but an environment that can embrace new people. **This is an art all leaders must continue to develop.**



Target Group

These studies were prepared for use with people engaged in active discipleship. With very good leadership and patience these studies can be used with just about anyone. The only exception to this would be very new and unchurched Christians. For them it is advisable that these studies **not** be introduced until after more elementary Bible teaching, and having completed basic discipleship training.

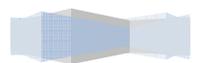
Finally...

In these studies I have written in the manner in which I have received and understood. This will mean I may have used words with which you or some member of the group may not be familiar. I advise you to keep a dictionary handy and please do not be put off by this; simply treat it as a vocabulary extension exercise! This all assists with the development process!

Whatever you do, kick thoughts around, examine, challenge, question...enjoy. I know that for those who do this, these studies will prove to be stimulating, instructive, equipping and very beneficial.

Have a great time! Yours in walking worthy, Shane

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