

## Serendipity Bible study

Here's a neat approach to familiarize yourself with some favourite bible stories while discovering your own story in a fun and non-anxious way. All you have to do is to read, enter, experience and re-tell the story in your own words. And we're here to help you do just that. There are no wrong and right responses – only your willingness to be present in the moment and be open to listening to others as they share their stories too.

It's easy and no prior bible knowledge is needed to dive in. The most important thing is that you participate as meaningfully and authentically as possible and always give reasons for your responses.

### *Week 1*

#### **Moses and the Burning Bush**

**3.** Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. <sup>3</sup> So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

<sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

<sup>5</sup> "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup> Then he said, "I am the God of your father,<sup>[a]</sup> the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. <sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and

Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. <sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

<sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

<sup>12</sup> And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you<sup>[b]</sup> will worship God on this mountain.”

<sup>13</sup> Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

<sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.<sup>[c]</sup> This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

## Background

Moses was raised in the palace of Egypt in line to be the next Pharaoh. Circumstances made him flee for his life and he finds himself in the household of Jethro, a Medianite. He spent forty years looking after his father-in-law’s sheep.

If you were Moses, what would you have been thinking during those years of shepherding?

- a. I’ve got to find a way out of here, fast
- b. This is it; I’m resigned to living like this for the rest of my life
- c. Surely this can’t be what God prepared me for?
- d. I’m educated, skilled and still relatively young. I need to find meaningful work
- e. What a mess I’ve walked into. Better if I stayed in Egypt in spite of the consequences

## Main course

- a) Picture yourself as Moses seeing the burning bush. Take time to explain in detail how you would have responded to seeing this phenomenon. Make sure you include your thoughts, physical reaction, feelings and emotional expressions as you re-live and narrate this experience in your small group.

Compare these with the responses of the others in the group. What are the similarities/differences?

- b) Could you set up a scenario in which Moses is explaining his interaction with God to his father and mother -in-law, his wife and her sisters in the household? Assume their different roles and act out what it must have looked and sounded like.

#### Dessert

- a) How would you have reacted, felt and thought when if you heard the words "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt"?
- Fear
  - Insecure
  - Courage
  - Significance
  - Confusion
  - Who me?
  - Must be kidding

Is there a situation that God is calling you into that might feel absurd/too big to handle/out of your depth? Or like Moses, are you finding yourself "tending sheep" right now? Or do you feel you are treading "holy ground"?

How might this story have influenced your response? Share your thoughts with the group.

## ***Week 2***

Matthew 14:22-33

### **Jesus/Peter walk on water**

<sup>22</sup> Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

<sup>25</sup> Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. <sup>26</sup> When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

<sup>27</sup> But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

<sup>28</sup> "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

<sup>29</sup> "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

<sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

<sup>32</sup> And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. <sup>33</sup> Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Imagine you were one of the disciples (not Peter). What thoughts might have been going through your mind when you heard Jesus inviting Peter to step out of the boat? Remember it was a stormy night.

- Jesus was out of his mind
- Peter was even more out of his mind for considering
- Jesus was testing Peter
- Jesus was joking and talking figuratively
- You mis-heard the conversation
- The whole episode seemed crazy
- Any other?

Imagine that you were Peter. Imagine that you are in a storm right now – emotional, relational, financial or, maybe not. Describe how you feel when you hear Jesus inviting you to step out.

- a) Tentative
- b) Emboldened
- c) Courageous
- d) Frightened
- e) Unsure (if it is really Jesus and he actually said those words)
- f) Willing to give it a shot
- g) Wanted to first get a life jacket
- h) Other

When he began to sink, Peter must have:

- a) Known he had made a mistake and should have stayed in the boat
- b) Thought he may die
- c) Doubted Jesus
- d) Regretted his impulsiveness
- e) Lost his faith in Jesus
- f) Thought he had been tricked
- g) Other?

Are you in a situation such as the disciples were in? In a boat, in a storm; scared, seeing apparitions? How would you respond if Jesus invited you to get off the boat and walk towards him (on water)?

What would it have taken for you to worship Jesus with the words “Truly you are the Son of God”?

Share your responses with the group.

***Remember: If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat! – John Ortberg***

## Week 3

### The Parable of the Lost Son and/or the Forgiving Father

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup> "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup> "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

<sup>22</sup> "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup> 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

<sup>28</sup> "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so

I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!

<sup>31</sup> "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Which character do you identify with most in this story? Why?

- The prodigal
- The father
- The elder son
- The fatted calf
- None at all

What part of the story appeals to you most?

- The plight of the prodigal son
- The father's unreserved love
- The elder son's response
- The whole story
- Nothing really stands out
- Some other aspect?

Where are you in your relationship with God right now?

- In a foreign land
- On your way back home
- Having a reckless time away from home
- At home
- Not sure

Are there moments in your life where you have experienced any or all of these narratives? Explain to the group.

What is your biggest take away from this parable? Why? How does it inform your outlook on life this coming week?

## **Week 4**

### **Naaman Healed of Leprosy**

**5** Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.<sup>[a]</sup>

**2** Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. **3** She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

**4** Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. **5** "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents<sup>[b]</sup> of silver, six thousand shekels<sup>[c]</sup> of gold and ten sets of clothing. **6** The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

**7** As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

**8** When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."**9** So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. **10** Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

**11** But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. **12** Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

**13** Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" **14** So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.



**15** Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."

**16** The prophet answered, "As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

Divide your small group into three smaller (sub) groups. Have each one take the role of Naaman, the little slave girl and Elisha.

Here are the tasks for each group.

Naaman's group: Imagine you are relating this whole account to your son. What would you highlight? How would you express your perspective of the God of Israel?

The slave girl's group: If you were to prepare a sermon on God's purpose for our lives, how would you use this story to develop it?

Elisha's group: As a man of God you've seen God at work many times. Naaman was an important official. Explain your actions in not seeing him in person and sending him off to wash in a "not so clean" river.

Now gather back as a large group.

What is the point of this story? Choose one and share the reason for our answer.

- To show God's awesome power of healing
- A lesson on humility
- That everyone, however small, has a part to play in God's story
- Obedience is key, whatever the circumstance
- Any other?
- Can't decide
- More than one

Take away

In our current context, which character do you identify with? Why?

What truth (from this story) do you take with you into the week ahead? Explain.

## **Week 5**

### **The Transfiguration**

**17** After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **2** There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. **3** Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

**4** Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

**5** While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

**6** When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. **7** But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." **8** When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

**9** As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

If you were one of the three disciples who were with Jesus, how would you have felt after this experience? Why?

- Confused
- Anxious
- Exhilarated
- Frightened
- joyful
- suspicious
- Grateful
- A combination of any of the above

How would you have reacted if you heard a loud voice?

- Thought someone was playing games
- Exactly as the disciples reacted
- Run away in fright
- Kept standing and checked if that really was God's voice
- Overcome with joy
- Any other?

After seeing the transfiguration (of Jesus) and experiencing the entire episode, how would your (as a disciple) perception of Jesus have changed?

In what ways does God ask us to "Listen to Jesus" in our present context? What has been our response?

Food for thought:

- How did one or more of the three disciples who climbed the mountain know it was Elijah and Moses?
- Why do you think Jesus instructed them to "tell no one"?

## **Week 6**

Jonah 1

### **Jonah flees from God**

**1** The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: **2** “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

**3** But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

**4** Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. **5** All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. **6** The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”

**7** Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. **8** So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”

**9** He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

**10** This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

**11** The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”

**12** “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

**13** Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. **14** Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased.” **15** Then they took Jonah and threw him

overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. <sup>16</sup>At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

### Jonah's Prayer

<sup>17</sup>Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

<sup>1</sup><sup>[a]</sup>From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. <sup>2</sup>He said:

"In my distress I called to the LORD,  
and he answered me.

From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,  
and you listened to my cry.

<sup>3</sup>You hurled me into the depths,  
into the very heart of the seas,  
and the currents swirled about me;  
all your waves and breakers  
swept over me.

<sup>4</sup>I said, 'I have been banished  
from your sight;  
yet I will look again  
toward your holy temple.'

<sup>5</sup>The engulfing waters threatened me,<sup>[b]</sup>  
the deep surrounded me;  
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

<sup>6</sup>To the roots of the mountains I sank down;  
the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you, LORD my God,  
brought my life up from the pit.

<sup>7</sup>"When my life was ebbing away,  
I remembered you, LORD,  
and my prayer rose to you,  
to your holy temple.

<sup>8</sup>"Those who cling to worthless idols  
turn away from God's love for them.

<sup>9</sup>But I, with shouts of grateful praise,

will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.

I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'"

**10** And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah was asked to go to Nineveh but he went the other way.

Have you done that? When and why?

Have you heard the phrase "Don't be a Jonah"? Where do you think that comes from and what does it mean?

The story of Jonah is a fascinating one. Read the whole book (only 4 chapters) to get an idea of how human (and very much like us) Jonah is.

How much do you identify with Jonah?

- Not ready to obey Gods instructions or call on your life
- Scared of possible push back
- Doubt that God can handle calamity
- Not at all
- Somewhat. Please explain

If you were Jonah in the ship, how would you have responded when you saw the calamity around you?

Imagine you were a member of the crew. How would you have responded when you saw what unfolded?

What about Jonah's story intrigues you? Why?

- The running away account
- The big fish part
- How the crew believed in God
- The storm and how it calmed down
- Jonah's repentance and salvation
- All of the above
- None of the above

What ONE lesson would you take away with you into the week?

## ***Week 7***

### **Daniel in the den of lions**

**6** It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, <sup>2</sup> with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. <sup>3</sup> Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. <sup>4</sup> At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. <sup>5</sup> Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

<sup>6</sup> So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever! <sup>7</sup> The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. <sup>8</sup> Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." <sup>9</sup> So King Darius put the decree in writing.

<sup>10</sup> Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. <sup>11</sup> Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. <sup>12</sup> So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions' den?"

The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."

<sup>13</sup> Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day." <sup>14</sup> When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

**15** Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, "Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed."

**16** So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

**17** A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. **18** Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

**19** At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. **20** When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

**21** Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! **22** My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

**23** The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

**24** At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

(Note: for a fuller understanding of and context to this story, read Daniel Chapters 1-5 as well)

By openly disobeying the Kings decree, was Daniel?

- Foolish
- Defiant
- Not willing to take his context into account
- Deliberately inviting trouble
- Testing God
- Placing the king(who liked him) in a difficult position



- Other?

If you were Daniel and there was a modern day version of this situation, what would you have done?

- Openly flouted orders
- Been more circumspect
- Tried to advocate against unjust laws
- Changed your way and place of praying
- Gone underground
- Left the country
- None of the above

After reading this account, I feel:

- Overwhelmed
- Skeptical
- Filled with awe
- Nothing in particular
- Disturbed
- Cynical

In what ways have you experienced a "Daniel in the lion's den" moment?

What lesson(s) do you learn from this story?

For further reflection: In what ways do Christians compromise their faith?

## **Week 8**

Luke 10:25-37

### **The Parable of the Good Samaritan**

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

<sup>27</sup> He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

<sup>28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

<sup>36</sup> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Note: the Samaritans and Jews did not like each other. Although there no open hostility between them, the Jews viewed the Samaritans with disdain.

In this parable Jesus was trying to teach the young lawyer a lesson:

- About religious hypocrisy

- That Jews should love Samaritans
- The need to be careful when traveling alone
- That you don't need to be a priest to help someone
- The importance of loving God and loving your neighbor
- That our neighbour is anyone in need
- Any other?

## Perspectives

Each person in the group assume the role of each of the actors mentioned in the parable; the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan, the victim, the innkeeper, the donkey(?). Assume that you are being interviewed by a journalist to recount your version of what you saw, experienced, how you responded and why. What would you say?

What keeps you or makes you shy away from being a loving neighbor?

- Busyness
- Prejudice
- Apathy
- Shyness
- Ignorance
- Official duties

A social experiment as performed in a seminary was based on this story. A group of seminarians were given the task of preaching on this parable. They were asked to come to a classroom for a preparation session but were told (just before the time of starting) that they had to hurry since the class had already begun. On the way, the experimenters planted a person in the hallway through which the seminarians had to pass, who was in obvious distress: coughing, spluttering and in need of help. Only 10% of the seminarians actually stopped to ask if they could help him in spite of the fact that they were preparing a sermon on this very parable. The Princeton experiment concluded that people in a hurry are less likely to help others than those who were not. In the context of these seminarians, perception of time pressure or "having limited time" resulted in behaviors incongruent to their education and career: the devotion to help others.

What are your observations and learnings either through our own experience or that of others?

What could you do that would sensitize yourself to being more of a loving neighbor?

## ***Week 9***

Luke 19:1-10

### **Jesus and Zacchaeus the Tax Collector**

**19** Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.<sup>3</sup> He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."<sup>6</sup> So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

<sup>7</sup> All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

<sup>8</sup> But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Note: Tax collectors were reviled by both the Jews and the Romans. The Romans, for obvious reasons but also for the fact that they knew they cheated them of the money (taxes) being collected. The Jews did not like them because they were serving the Romans, could have snitched on those who didn't pay taxes while knowing that they did not give all they collected from them to the Romans either. Jewish tax collectors had very few friends.

What strikes you most about this story? Why?

What strikes you about the way Jesus engaged Zacchaeus?

If you were Zacchaeus, how would you have felt when Jesus invited himself for dinner to your house?

- Intimidated
- Thought about what you may have to hide from Jesus (in your home)
- Fallen off the tree in shock
- Responded like Zacchaeus
- Confused

For Zacchaeus to have responded in that way, he must have:

- Thought the game was up and he might as well confess
- Felt sincerely repentant
- Wanted to make a big show (of his generosity) to the Jews around him
- Said it but didn't mean it – knew he could change his mind afterwards

Think about the words of Jesus " ...for the Son of man has come to seek and save the lost".

What do these words mean to you?

Do you know of any other parables in which Jesus talks about "finding the lost ...." (don't look now :- suggested parables below \*)

When Zacchaeus responded in the way he did, he experienced:

- Relief from the guilt he had been carrying
- Transformation – of heart, mind and soul
- A desire to follow Jesus and his teachings
- Joy and peace
- All of the above
- None of the above

In what ways does your life need to be transformed?

\* Answer

Parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost (prodigal) son

## My Story

Suppose Jesus were to invite himself to your house. Bob Munger in his little booklet "*My heart- Christ's home*" describes the areas of life as the rooms of a house. Take an inventory of your own life, then give yourself a grade on each room as follows: A – excellent; B – good; C - passing but needs a little dusting; D – barely passing, needs a lot of cleaning.

**Library:** this room is your mind. What you allow to go into it and come out of it. It is the "control room" of the entire house.

**Dining room:** Appetites, desires, those things that your mind and spirit feed on for nourishment

**Drawing room:** this room is where you draw close to God, seek time with him daily, not just in times of distress or need

**Workshop:** this room is where your gifts talents and skills are put to work for God by the power of the spirit

**Rumpus room:** the social area of your life - the things you do to amuse yourself and others

**Hall closet:** the one secret place that no one knows about but is a real stumbling block in your walk in the Spirit

## ***Week 10***

### **Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand**

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

<sup>15</sup> As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

<sup>17</sup> "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

<sup>18</sup> "Bring them here to me," he said. <sup>19</sup> And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. <sup>20</sup> They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>21</sup> The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

What part(s) of this account appeal to you?

- How Jesus can make a little, a lot
- Trust in Jesus since he knows what he is doing
- The compassion of Jesus
- The unbelief of the disciples
- Any other?

If you were a disciple and Jesus asked you to provide something for the crowds to eat (verse 16), you would have:

- Thought he was losing it
- Thought you heard wrong
- Been confused and wondered "what now?"
- Wanted to run away and hide
- Take Jesus to a side and rationalize with him
- Organize the other disciples to talk sense to Jesus when they got a chance
- Just trusted him anyway

Imagine you were a family member (who was there) of the little boy who gave his food. What and how would you have debriefed the events of that day? How would they have changed (or not) you?

Have you ever had a moment when God took something small you offered Him and used it for a greater purpose?

What would you give this week to God to be used for a much bigger purpose?



## ***Week 11***

John 13

### **Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet**

**13** It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

<sup>2</sup> The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup> so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup> After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

<sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

<sup>8</sup> "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

<sup>9</sup> "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

<sup>12</sup> When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup> "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Note: Foot washing was the task of the lowest of servants in a household. At the door, this lowly servant (often a slave) would wash the dusty feet of visitors, most of who wore sandals and walked on the unpaved streets of Palestine. There may not have been any servants in the place they were eating.

If you were one of the disciples, seeing Jesus wrap a towel and get some water would have:

- Made you feel very uncomfortable
- Confused you
- Not moved you
- Quickly got up and taken over from him
- Not allowed your feet to be washed
- Whispered among the other disciples about what this means

What did being a servant (in that era) mean?

- Not having a voice of your own
- Being available to do the owner's bidding at any time
- Unable to have a schedule of your own
- Be willing to do things that others wouldn't do
- Not receive any or little praise
- Always putting the needs of others above yours

Read Philippians 2: 5 – 8:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a **servant**, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

How are we called to be this kind of servant today, in our posture, in our attitude?

On a scale of 1 -10 (being the most difficult) rate how hard it is to for you to have this attitude as a Christ follower. Give reasons for your response.

1 ..... 10

What does "washing the feet" mean for you as you go into this week or from now on? In what ways could you look for opportunities to "wash feet"?

Week 12

Matthew 7: 24-29

Week 12

### **The Wise and Foolish Builders**

<sup>24</sup> "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

<sup>28</sup> When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Looking into the scriptures:

1. Personal weather report: Today's forecast in my life is for:
  - Clear
  - partly cloudy
  - overcast
  - scattered showers
  - rain
  - thunderstorms
  - hurricane
  
2. Who is Jesus describing in this passage?
  - housing developers
  - people with hearing problems
  - a crowd faced with a big decision
  - nobody I know
  
3. The rock Jesus recommends as a strong foundation is":
  - the truth of the gospel
  - faith in Jesus
  - faith expressed in action
  - blind obedience
  - Jesus himself

4. The sand Jesus refers to is:
  - his agnosticism
  - wishy washy commitment
  - weak doctrine
  - the world's values
  
5. The point of this story is that:
  - everybody builds a house somewhere
  - everybody will experience storms
  - survival depends on the kind of house you build
  - survival depends on choosing the right foundation
  - if you don't follow Jesus spiritual disaster will follow

**My own story** (*Note: you don't need to share your rating with the group. This is a self reflection exercise. Take your evaluations to God and have God speak to you*).

1. The theme song at my house these days is:
  - what kind of fool am I
  - raindrops keep falling on my head
  - Rock of Ages
  - stormy weather
  
  - bridge over troubled water
  
2. when it comes to house building I am
  - getting ready to settle down
  - pouring the foundation
  - building the house
  - Throwing a housewarming party
  - enjoying the security of a well-built home
  - thinking about moving
  
3. The foundation for my house is made-up of:
  - sand and water
  - cinder blocks without mortar
  - different materials that don't fit together
  - miscellaneous rock piles thrown in a pile
  - reinforced poured concrete
  - top-of-the-line steel reinforced concrete blocks with mortar
  
4. I will describe my life to be a house that:
  - is steady on a solid foundation

- settles occasionally (cracks around my doors)
- has serious roof leaks and broken pipes
- won't make it through the next storm
- is destroyed and I'm trying to rebuild

5. In order for me to build my house on a firm foundation I need:

- A barn-raising party
- support from my friends
- instruction on the right foundation
- a desire to move
- strength for the heavy labour
- a good set of drawings
- continued encouragement as I make continuous renovations
- to turn the project over to the master builder