

In daily life - towards imitation

Clarence Jordan, the prominent civil rights leader, told of going to court with a young man who had refused to report to the Selective Service office when he was drafted during the years of the Vietnam War. The young man was opposed to the war on moral grounds and Clarence Jordan stood with him as he made his case to the Judge. He was eloquent and spoke with deep conviction and passion. The Judge was visibly moved by the young man's sincerity and it was obvious that he wanted to be lenient. With great sympathy he said, "I deeply appreciate your convictions and I recognise your earnestness, but as a Judge of this court I have no option but to..." The young man shouted, "I have something to say, Judge!" Clarence said, "I pulled the young man's arm and whispered in his ear, 'Be quiet, he's going to go light on you if you behave yourself.'" The judge started to speak again and said, "I want you to know that I have no choice but to..." Again the young man shouted, "I have something to say, Judge!" Again the Judge started to speak and again the young man interrupted. This time, he continued on to say, "Judge, you're going to tell me that you have no choice. You *do* you have a choice! *You can resign!*" There is always a choice, but sometimes the choices are hard and the price to be paid for making the right choice is high.

STUDY QUESTIONS – EXPLORING THE INFORMATION

Luke 18: 15-17 Why do you think the disciples try to prevent the little children being brought to Jesus? Are there people who you struggle to extend the grace of God to? What does it mean to "receive the kingdom of God as a little child"?

18-30 What are the things that you struggle to let go of as Jesus bids you 'Come, follow me?' Why do you think it is hard "for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God?"

31-34 Why do think the disciples were *blind* to Jesus' predictions?

35-43 The blind beggar refuses to be silenced by the crowd. Are there any ways in which you need to focus more on Jesus, and less on the opinion of others? Jesus says to the blind beggar, 'What do you want me to do for you?' If Jesus said that to you how would you respond?

Prayer suggestion:

The rich young man in today's passage was unable to follow Jesus as he couldn't let go of some of the things that were holding him back. The Blind Beggar had open hands - open to Jesus. Draw around your hand on a piece of paper. Write a prayer in the space around your hand asking God to help you to come to him empty handed, letting go of anything that might hold you back.

INSPIRE

Everywhere...in everything



Weekly discipleship and spiritual growth resources for all ages, groups and individuals. Follow up material on Sunday's teaching for groups and individuals.

Week beginning: 10th January 2016.

GROWING AT HOME

Three suggested discipleship activities suitable for all ages to help you grow, based on up - to God; in - to each other; out - to mission

Up

Jesus says "Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows." (Luke 12:7) Thank God that He knows you. You are precious to Him.

In

Discuss together with your family, or think on your own, about some words to describe God's character using the letters of the word LOVE. [e.g. Loving... Open..... etc] Write these words out and stick them on the fridge or pinboard.

Out

Over a meal, talk together about how you could give a present to someone that doesn't cost any money at all. You could make some alternative gift vouchers e.g. "cooking a meal" or "mending something" or "drawing or painting a picture".

DAILY READINGS AND PRAYERS.

These daily readings are the same as the ones used in church every morning from 9 - 9.30. Feel free to join us, or use them at home. Read one or both of the readings asking yourself, "What is God saying to me, personally?" and, "How can I respond today?" If you are pressed for time there is a focus verse from the passages. Try reading the verse slowly, three or four times, allowing God to shape your heart and mind through His word. You can use these together with our daily prayer diary from the monthly newsheet.

Monday 11th January.

Readings: Psalm 2; Matthew 21: 1-17. Focus verse: 14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they were indignant.

Tuesday 12th January.

Readings: Psalm ; Matthew 21: 18-32. Focus verse: 28 'What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard." 29 "I will not," he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. 30 'Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, "I will, sir," but he did not go. 31 'Which of the two did what his father wanted?' 'The first,' they answered.

Wednesday 13th January.

Readings: Psalm 14; Matthew 21: 33-end. Focus verse: 42 Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes"?

Thursday 14th January

Readings: Psalm 21; Matthew 22: 1-14. Focus verse: 8 'Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Friday 15th January.

Readings: Psalm 67, Matthew 22: 15-33. Focus verse: 29 Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. 30 At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.'

Saturday 16th January.

Readings: Psalm 29, Matthew 22:34-end. Focus verse: 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

SUNDAY'S TEACHING: RESOURCES FOR GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS.

This week's teaching in a nutshell:

Luke 18:15-43: Being Open One of my favourite books is 'The Great Divorce' by C.S. Lewis. In it the Narrator, in a dream, boards a bus on a drizzly afternoon and embarks on an incredible voyage through Heaven and Hell. He meets a host of supernatural beings far removed from his expectations and comes to significant realizations about the ultimate consequences of everyday actions and behaviour. In the story we meet characters who cannot let go of "even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell" – petty grudges and jealousies, the need for revenge, egotism – and in holding on to them choose Hell over Heaven. One of the most famous quotes in the book is this: "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." Being open to God means being open to change – being open to let go of things that prevent us from saying to God "Thy will be done".

Our problem is that so often we want to hold on to (or at least cannot imagine letting go of) the 'souvenirs of Hell'. We find it difficult to lay them down, to come with empty hands, as Jesus bids us "come, follow me". In another of Lewis' books, 'The Problem of Pain', he writes: "the gates of hell are locked on the inside." In the Gospels, Jesus never forces anyone to follow him. Christianity isn't, and never should be, a coercive faith – it is always a choice. Our reading from Luke this week spans four encounters – Jesus welcoming little children (vv. 15-17); The rich young ruler and Jesus (vv. 18-30); Jesus taking his disciples aside to predict his death and resurrection (vv. 31-34); The blind beggar and Jesus (vv. 35-43). Each of these passages reveal what it means to be open to God, and, conversely, what it means to keep God shut out – not being prepared to come with open, empty hands, not being willing to accept the cost of following Jesus, and to change.

The blind beggar perfectly demonstrates what it is to be open to God. He calls out to Jesus, pleading that Jesus would have mercy on him. Even when the crowd try to silence him, he calls ever the louder – "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus orders the man be brought to him, and intriguingly asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" We might think that the answer is obvious – he is blind and obviously he wants to see. But we need to remember that if the man's sight were to be restored, his whole life would change. In traditional Middle Eastern society beggars are a recognized part of the community and are understood to be offering 'services' to it. Every pious person is expected to give to the poor. So we might expect the blind beggar simply to say to Jesus – "Give to God! Give me money!" A blind man, such as the beggar in this story, has no education, training, employment record or marketable skills. If healed, self-support will be extremely difficult. Indeed, is it not in his interests to remain blind? The grace of God, mediated through Jesus, is free but not cheap, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer has affirmed. Is this blind man ready to accept the new responsibilities and challenges that will come to him if he is healed? The blind beggar stretches out empty hands to Jesus, not for a coin, but for healing. His sight is restored. He follows Jesus, glorifying God. His faith - his reliance on God and willingness to change - has saved him. We might say that faith is coming to Jesus and letting Jesus do what only he can do....A nice easy question (!) for the New Year – are you open to God? Are you prepared to set aside the things that get in the way of you following God's will in your life, to be obedient to his call?