

In daily life - towards imitation

Here's a story or testimony to flesh this out...I heard a story from Tennessee last week. Someone went into a shop and left this note: I am a drug addict. About 11 or 12 years ago I robbed this store with a gun. I do not use drugs any more and I feel I must make amends to the people I have hurt in the past. I came in your store around 9 or 10 o'clock in 2002 or 2003 and I got a six pack of beer and asked for cigarettes. When the register opened to give change I pulled out a gun and took about \$300 from the register then drove away in a white car. I hope you will accept this money and find forgiveness. Peace be with you. Anonymous.

STUDY QUESTIONS – EXPLORING THE INFORMATION (ABOUT 30 MINUTES)

Ephesians 2: 1-17. What does this passage say about the reason for, the means of and the results of salvation?

Hebrews 13: 11-16. What does this say about Jesus? About us? About others?

2 Corinthians 5: 16-21. How does salvation make us see others?

How does this study affect your spiritual confidence?

Living it out

Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiJBvThklns> How does this speak to you as an individual? As a group?

Prayer suggestion:

Pray for each other, that you may know you are found, that you have an identity through your salvation, or that you can be transformed. Use the prayer for Monday this week on the sheet to pray for the whole church.

Joining a group and other resources:

We encourage everyone to join a group if possible. We have daytime or evening groups and youth cells. If you would like to know more, please visit our website, or contact Guy on 01423 504160. There are many great resources to help you pray and enjoy the Scriptures on a daily basis.

www.pray-as-you-go.org A 12 minute guided prayer and meditation to listen to.

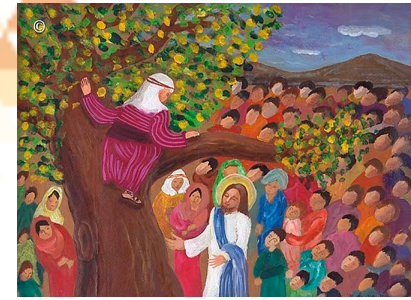
<https://www.wordlive.org> Many excellent daily reading approaches, available as an app.

<http://www.sacredspace.ie/> A short guided prayer and meditation to read.

Or download the app from Soul Survivor, with short daily videos: <http://bible.soulsurvivor.com/>

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: 17th 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 God's love is high and wide and deep. What is the highest place you can think of? A skyscraper? Mount Everest? The moon? God's love is higher. What is the widest distance you can imagine? The Stray? The ocean? From the earth to the sun? God's love goes beyond that! What is the deepest place you know of? A well? The sea bed? God's love is deeper.

In God shows us the extent of his love on the cross. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." (1 John 3: 16) Make a cross with anything you have to hand (e.g. pipe cleaners or lolly sticks or straws). Write Higher, Deeper, Wider on the various parts of the cross. Carry the cross with you or pin it up to remind you that wherever you go God's love is surrounding you.

Out How will knowing that no one is excluded from God's love make an impact on us and change us? At Easter as a church we send gifts to young men who are in prison at Wetherby. Pray that the cards, and other gifts given through St Mark's will carry God's high, deep and wide love in a tangible way to these young people who are having a hard time in their lives. Who do you know who needs to hear and experience that God's high, deep and wide love is for them? How could you show them this or tell them?

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 18th January. Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Lord Jesus, you have always loved us from the beginning, and you have shown the depth of your love in dying for us on the cross and thereby sharing our sufferings and wounds. At this moment, we lay all the obstacles that separate us from your love at the foot of your cross. Roll back the stones which imprison us. Awaken us to your resurrection morning. There may we meet the brothers and sisters from whom we are separated. Amen.

Tuesday 19th January.

Readings: Psalm 132; Matthew 24: 15-28. Focus verse: 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Wednesday 20th January.

Readings: Psalm 81; Matthew 24:29-end. Focus verse: 45 'Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. 47 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

Thursday 21st January

Readings: Psalm 76; Matthew 25: 1-13. Focus verse: 10 'But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. 11 'Later the others also came. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us!" 12 'But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I don't know you." 13 'Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Friday 22nd January.

Readings: Psalm 27, Matthew 25:14-30. Focus verse: 22 'The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold: see, I have gained two more." 23 'His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Saturday 23rd January.

Readings: Psalm 122, Matthew 25: 31-end. Focus verse: 34 'Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

SUNDAY'S TEACHING: RESOURCES FOR GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS.

This week's teaching in a nutshell:

Luke 19: 1-27: Loving and being loved as a weak outsider If you had to say the God likes to do one thing in and through people throughout the Bible, what would it be? Let's have a look at the kind of things He does: He makes Joseph's rise to fame in Egypt saving the lives of his entire family. Through Noah's faithfulness God saves his family as well as animal life. He tells Abraham that the blessing of the promise of nationhood and land was not only for his descendants but for all families on the earth. After 430 years in Egypt, an entire people is saved through Moses. Through Esther's rise to power the Jewish people are saved from annihilation. Again and again, our God is a God who saves people.

So when Jesus says of Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house..." he is celebrating what God likes to do best in people's lives. Save them. After all, in Matthew when the angel tells Joseph that Mary's child is conceived of the Holy Spirit, and that he is "to give him the name Jesus," he adds, "because he will save his people from their sins." The name "Jesus" (from the Hebrew Joshua) means salvation.

Christians are people who have been saved by being forgiven, who are being saved by being transformed and who ultimately will be saved when we see God face to face and we shall be as we were always meant to be.

As I think we are already seeing, being saved has many, many aspects - simple definitions are impossible. God loves to save by delivering from enemies, from sin, from addiction, from enemies. God brings salvation through giving health, well-being, and healing. He loves to rescue from slavery, give ongoing protection and preservation from evil, and rescue us from death. God is a god who saves.

In a nutshell, we see what being saved means in the story of this broken, rejected man. We see how we are saved. And we see what being saved does to us. We see that Zacchaeus, who was seen as traitor of his own people has his identity restored – Jesus declares him a true son of Abraham. And as we will always come back to, knowing who you are in Christ is He was found. He had his identity restored and he was transformed. The question is, how does God want to save you? And, like Zacchaeus, are you ready to receive it?

I know what it's like to feel lost. On the outside. His shortness was surely not just a question of his physical stature, but surely how he felt inside. He went up the tree, because he did not want to be seen. He lacked any confidence to believe that he could be wanted.

I know many of us feel this. If there is one thing that I hope this encounter with Jesus could do for you today it is this: to give you spiritual confidence. So many of us are competent in many areas of life – professionally we stand up in front of people, we juggle, we lead. But when it comes to the Lord, we struggle to believe that we can be seen. Zacchaeus was lost, alienated by the crowd. Undeserving of Jesus' attention. But here is the beautiful truth for Zacchaeus, and for the Zacchaeus in us: Jesus wanted to be with him. He is not only a God who saves you, He is a God who seeks you.

A confession. I once hid from my Mum and Dad on holiday, to see if they would seek me. I wanted to be looked for and I wanted to be found. I was – and they were not too happy! But you don't need to test Jesus' love. He stops under the tree and says to this little fellow, "I choose you." He wants to be with him. And look at the language, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." "But Lord," he might have said, "My house isn't ready." "Doesn't matter, I take you as I find you." "But Lord, my life isn't ready." "I said come immediately, not when you think you have managed to put on an impressive show." "But Lord, do you really want me?" "Yes, I must come to your house. This is what gives me joy."

For me this is so beautifully demonstrated in the story of Hosea. 760 years before Jesus was born the people of Israel in the north were doing well. In fact, so well that they had completely forgotten God. They had walked away from their calling to be a people who would be a blessing. You would expect God to be furious. He had rescued them, given them their land, given them a beautiful identity.

But God called a man called Hosea and told him, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods." Hosea married Gomer, a prostitute. They had two children, and all seemed to be going well. Yet, just as Israel wandered from God, Gomer wandered from her husband and slept with others. But because God had told him to echo His heart, Hosea didn't give up, and wandered the streets at night trying to find his wife again. He was driven by a divine love that believes and hopes all things and he found her dirty, destitute and chained to an auction block in a filthy slave market, a shadow of what she was. How could anyone love her now? But Hosea bought her from her slavery for 15 shekels of silver and 13 bushels of barley, saying to her, "You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be towards you."

That is exactly the position God is in. I pursue you, I love you, even if you continue to prostitute yourself. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who will go searching the hills for you until he finds you, and will bring you back home. To be saved is to be found. If we could know that we are found, as we are, we would have no problems with spiritual confidence. We could stop hiding. We could be authentically ourselves.

And this tells me we have to look out for the weak as well. The outsiders. Because they are the ones Jesus looks for. All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.' Don't join the mutterers! If you find yourself muttering, remember that you were lost, and found...if there is no one who can be an outsider for Jesus, no one who he does not seek, then there is no one who can be an outsider for you.

And then of course we see in Zacchaeus what being saved does. It totally transformed him. It changed his heart, his life, his relationships with others, his idolatry. Because in the Bible being saved isn't just about being forgiven for your sins but about being delivered from their effect. Through Ezekiel God had made this clear - he said that he wanted to give us a new heart which would make us want to keep his commandments. This is what being saved will feel like.

Do you think it was difficult for Zacchaeus to give away all that money? To be released from his idol? No, I think it had suddenly become the thing he most wanted to do. Because they knew they had been saved. Salvation means restoration. Not only was it good for that shop to get their money back. Not only was it good for Zacchaeus's victims to get theirs. It was also great for Zacchaeus. Because he had been released from his idol and freed to serve God.

The purpose of life is to serve God and to use what we've been given for his glory. That is the point of the rather threatening parable that follows the Zacchaeus story. It isn't telling us that God is a nasty king who wants to get on our back - Jesus is telling us that God wants us to use what we have been given. And the more we realise we have been found, the more we realise we are children of a heavenly Father, the more natural it will be for us to be increasingly open to others, to live for others. It's psychologically brilliant for outsiders to be able to contribute. To encourage others. So many people I know who struggle with depression or mental health issues find alleviation in being able to serve and give to other people.

So how does this salvation happen? How does God bring it to you? How does he make it possible to deal with all the brokenness and sin and frustration and difficulty of our lives? The clue is in a tree. Zacchaeus climbed the sycamore tree to see Jesus. This tree if you like represented the nation of Israel, the old system, the way people used to try and justify themselves before God by going to the temple. So when Jesus calls Zacchaeus out of the tree he is doing something rather shocking – he's symbolically saying that the old Israel is being replaced. By himself. He is now the one who declares people the true children of Abraham. He is now the one offering salvation.

How does he do this? On another tree. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to become the ultimate outsider. If you feel you are far from all this, know that he's gone further. I really encourage you to read Hebrews chapter 13. In that chapter the writer describes how in the old system the priests would sacrifice animals in the temple, but then throw their bodies away to be burned outside the city so they couldn't contaminate anyone. Then in verse 12 he says, "And Jesus also suffered outside the city gates to make the people holy through his own blood." The place where Jesus was crucified is outside the old walls Jerusalem, a place of disgrace, a place of hiddenness, a place of ignominy, a place of the outsider. Jesus settled the question of your salvation in his body. I gave up trying to save myself, or thinking I could save others when I came to trust that, "It is the cross (that) is the power of God for those who are being saved (1 Cor 1:18).

God is a god who saves, who seeks, who finds, who transforms. At the end of the Bible a huge crowd sings out, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Do you know he wants to save you? Psalm 51 says, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation..." Stop hiding in the tree. Have confidence that Jesus wants to save you. Immediately. Today. And let him transform your life.