

## Portraits of Dissident devoted disciples

### Introduction

In a rapidly secularised society the challenge to every follower of Jesus Christ is to be a disciple who is fit for purpose. In each and every generation Christians have to learn how to engage in the unfinished task of being representatives of Jesus here on earth, and how to display the distinguishing traits of Christianity.

Imagine the scene. The bride and groom are standing there, the minister says "I pronounce you husband and wife." The legal status of the couple has just changed; they were single people now they are a couple. The moment they are married it is very difficult to feel and act in accordance to their new legal status. It takes a while to get accustomed to this reality. I heard of a married woman who for several weeks, kept on signing cheques in her maiden name, till the bank told her to stop.

Identities don't just change over night. What happens to the newly-weds also happens to a person when they become a follower of Jesus Christ. It takes time to become responsive to the things of God, but this is something, which the New Testament tells us we need to start to do, and quickly Ephesians Ch 2 vs. 4-5 spell this out. The reality is that the Christian has a new identity, which they need to respond to, so that they can show the distinctive traits of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ today.

This study is all about looking at how we can do this. We shall explore this under various images which the New Testament us to describe this transformational process.

### Session 1 Sons and Daughters

#### Introduction

To some the idea of God as Father can seem like a cold theological doctrine. The natural parallel we draw between earthly fathers and God as a heavenly father can be either helpful or not, can either bless us or blister us, depending on the type of experience we have had with our earthly fathers. The Bible reminds us that we have a heavenly Father who loves us more than words can say, we not only need to believe this, but also feel it.

### **The big picture**

1. What images and impressions come to mind when you think of your earthly father?
2. Can you think of one way you have experienced the love of God as your father, through the influence of your earthly father?
3. If you can complete this sentence, 'One way I would have liked to receive love from my dad was...'

### **The Biblical picture**

Read John Ch 1 vs 12 Galatians Ch 4 vs 4-7 and 1 John Ch 3 vs 1.

3. What do these passages teach you about your relationship to the Father?
4. God as a loving father is an image, which is unique to Christianity. How should this view of being a son or daughter of God colour your relationship with God and other followers of Jesus Christ?
5. How do you respond to God saying to you "You're mine forever?"
6. There are times when we can feel like outcasts and unworthy of God's love. What do you think causes us to feel this way?
7. Jesus lived in the affection of God as his father. Jesus very casually puts it 'The father loves the son' [John Ch 5 vs 20]. How have you felt God's fatherly love?

### **Being in the picture**

8. Can you think of specific area in your life where you struggle to live with the reality that you are loved by God?
9. Since we are sons and daughters of God, then we have also become brothers and sisters in Christ of other Christians. With that in mind what can you do to express genuine family love to other followers of Christ in your group/ cell  
in your home  
in your church  
among other Christians in the Town.

## Sessions 2

### Saints

#### Introduction

Living in Northampton the word 'Saints' identifies you are a Rugby supporter. For others the word saint is associated with people who are dead. For others the word saint is associated with those who live a blameless life. The Apostle Paul does not in anyway apologise for calling dissident disciples of Jesus as saints. In fact he uses the word saint interchangeably with the word believer. We all need to learn how to walk more deeply through life with God as Jesus did. This is a challenge for us all today.

#### The big picture

1. What images come to mind when you hear the word saint?
2. Picture someone you know who qualifies as a saint. Why do they fit this description?

#### The biblical picture

Read Ephesians Ch 1 vs 1, 18, Ch 2 vs 19, Ch 3vs 8 Ch 4 vs 11-13 Ch 5 vs 3 and Ch 6 vs 18.

3. What do you learn about Paul's view of sainthood in these passages?
4. What surprises you about this view?
5. If some called you a saint how would you respond?
6. Why do we have a hard time seeing ourselves as saints?
7. The term saint means to be 'set apart'. What does it mean in your life to be set apart for God?
8. What can you do to express your appreciation to God for making you a saint?

### **Being in the picture**

9. While God is looking for us to bring our behaviour into conformity to his word, he is also looking for our unique personalities to be developed. What are some of the attitudes and actions that should mark our lives as God's saints in

Your home

Your speech

Your neighbourhood

Your interactions with non-Christians

Your workplace.

10. How should we respond when we fall short of God's desire and standards for us as saints?

## **Session 3 Soldiers**

### **Introduction**

God has not only called us to sons and daughters, and saints but also soldiers. We can live under two misconceptions about Christianity, One that it is possible, in that we can learn how to do it, and secondly that it is pleasant. God calls us to serve him in the spiritual battles we each face every day. The central question we all have to ask 'What kind of soldier will I be today?' Are we going to be a 'Just say the word' soldier, or 'I'm not listening soldier'. The battles we face are real, we need think in military terms. If we have responded to the call of Jesus Christ we have enlisted, we are not civilians, living in peacetime, but soldiers in a war zone.

### **The big picture**

1. What are some of the responsibilities of a soldier in the military?
2. What qualities would you look for in a good soldier?

### **The biblical picture**

Read Ephesians Ch 6 vs 10-18

3. How is a Christian soldier?
4. What is some of the military language used in this passage?

5. We are not called to be weekend warriors. How do you think that weekend warriors affect the life of the Church?
6. What impact do you think that weekend warriors have on culture and society in which they live?
7. Why do we choose to be weekend warriors?
8. What can we do to encourage those who prefer to be weekend warriors to either be on the battlefield, or come back to the battlefield where Jesus asks them to be?
9. Why do you think that there are so many AWOL [absent with out leave] soldiers in the Church?
10. Have you ever been AWOL. What caused you to run from the battle?

### **Being in the picture**

11. A 'Just say the word' soldier is one who is ready for battle. What are the characteristics do you think that make such a person out?
12. What do you think are the rewards of being such a type of soldier?
13. What do you think are some of the costs?
14. what do you think you can do to an effective 'just say the word soldier' today?

## **Session 4 Ambassador**

### **Introduction**

An Ambassador is a representative of his country in another country. An Ambassador is not just a nice person, who tiptoes around tough situations and smiles a lot. But neither are they too pushy and demanding. Ambassadors often play a key role in reconciliation attempts. Ambassadors are neither obnoxious nor anonymous, but rather prove to be effective representatives of their sovereign sates.

### **The big picture**

1. If you had to write a job advertisement for an effective Ambassador, How would you write it?

## **The biblical picture**

Read 2 Corinthians Ch 5 vs 16-20

2. The Christian is Christ's ambassador entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. How does this aspect of your identity in Christ alter the way you look at the world around you, and your role in it?
3. What are the dangers and possible consequences of having an apathetic and anonymous ambassador in a tough and political situation?
4. What are the dangers of having this kind of ambassador representing God in today's world?
5. What are some of the possible consequences and dangers of having an obnoxious ambassador representing God in today's world?
6. Pause just for a moment and put yourself in the position of a person who has come on an Alpha course, and you have just met an obnoxious ambassador. How would you feel about this ambassador and his message?
7. What are some possible results in the lives of lost people when you are an effective ambassador?
8. Why is wisdom so effective in the life of an effective ambassador?

## **Being in the picture**

9. What do you think it means when you read the phrase 'being winsome in your witness'?
10. How can you develop this trait in your life?
11. Apart from a growing knowledge of the Bible and the basics of the Christian faith, what else must an ambassador be knowledgeable about to build bridges with lost people?
12. What do you think are some of the prevailing values within our culture to be aware of as you live as ambassadors of God's kingdom?
13. What can you do to develop your abilities to share your faith?

14. what practical things can you do to build bridges of reconciliation with the following groups of people?

Neighbours

Colleagues at work

Social acquaintances

Family members

Those who consider themselves your enemies.

## **Session 5**

### **Friends**

#### **Introduction**

Jesus once said to his followers ' I want you to know that when I look at you as my followers, I see you as being my friends, my personal close, trusted friends, yes you are sons and daughters, soldiers, saints and ambassadors but also friends.' We develop our friendship with Christ with learning how to do our part to grow the relationship.

#### **The big picture**

1. What qualities do you look for in a good friend?
2. Describe one fond memory of an experience with a friend [this could be recent or from the past]

#### **The biblical picture**

Read John Ch 15 vs .9-17

3. According to John how does Jesus show his friendship to us?
4. How can we show our friendship to Jesus?
5. In the last few weeks how has Jesus demonstrated his love and friendship to you?
6. What can you do to increase the quality and quantity of time spent with Jesus?

7. Often in our earthly relationships there are barriers, which are erected, and if we are going to progress the friendship forward we will never to remove the barriers. What are some of the barriers that remain between you and Jesus? How can you remove them?

8. What are you doing in your life right now to serve Jesus?

9. How can you enlarge your servant heart towards Jesus?

### **Being in the picture**

10. If Jesus was to tell you how he wants you to love Him, what would he say to you?

11. How would you respond to his request?

## **Session 6 Managers**

### **Introduction**

Several of Jesus parables involve stewards and managers. Some managers were effective and careful, others were cruel and unjust. The Apostle Paul encourages all Christians to be managers of the resources God has given them. Apostle Peter encouraged Christians believers to be good managers of God's grace, we all need to manage the resources God has given us through the Holy Spirit God has placed many things in our care and he calls us to manage them in a way that is pleasing to Him.

### **The big picture**

1. Have you ever been managed by a great manager? What made that manager great?

2. Why is it so critical to have an effective manager?

### **The biblical picture**

Read Luke Ch 12 vs. 42-48

3. How does Jesus portray the faithful manager and the unfaithful manager?

4. What consequences do each of the manager's face for the choice they make?

5. How do you feel when you read this parable? What kind of annual review would the owner give you as a manager?

4. Paul in 1 Corinthians Ch 4 vs 1-2 writes about the secret things God has given us. What are some of the 'secret things' we need to manage faithfully?

5. What can we do to grow in our knowledge of these 'secret things' and effectively manage them?

6. How can we effectively manage the material things God has put in our care?

### **Being in the picture**

7. How can we effectively manage those people in or home that God has placed in our care?

8. 1 Corinthians Ch 6 vs 19-20 speaks about the care of our bodies. If you were to leave your body in the care of someone for five years, who would you put it with and why?

9. Would you leave your body in the care of someone just like you? Why or why not?

10. What practical things can you do to be a better manager of your body? Think about sleep, drinking, holidays, work, and sexuality.