

Individuals With Faith

Introduction to the studies

These studies have been designed to help us look at the different phases our faith goes through as we choose to follow Jesus Christ. Since we are all individuals we all have unique relationships with the Lord and consequently there is a lot we can learn about God from one another. C.S. Lewis illustrates this point, in the “Screw Tape Letters”, when he makes this poignant remark;

“each person is created to see a different facet of God’s beauty- something no one else can see in quite the same way- and then to bless all worshippers through all eternity with an aspect of God they could not otherwise see”.

The aim of these studies is to give us all an opportunity to reflect upon the unique nature of our individual relationships with God, whilst at the same time, developing a greater awareness and appreciation of other people’s experiences of God so that we can encourage one another throughout the year;

*“And let us **consider** how we may spur one another towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another- and all the more as we see the Day approaching.”
Hebrews 10:24-25*

1st Study – Encountering Christ

How do different people respond to Jesus?

2nd Study- Problems with Jesus

What happens when we begin to have doubts and questions about Jesus?

3rd Study- Problems with ourselves

How do we “keep on keeping on” in our faith if we feel like we have let God down too many times?

Background to Peter

Peter was an uneducated, humble fisherman from Galilee with an impetuous nature that often got him into trouble and yet it was Peter that God chose to be the “rock” of his church. The fact that God chose to use Peter (an impulsive, unqualified, ordinary man) should be a real inspiration to us all; if God can use Peter then he can certainly use each one of us!

1. THE INITIAL ENCOUNTER

It is sometimes said that first impressions were made to last; hence the reason why so many of us can feel quite nervous about meeting someone for the first time - we certainly don't want to create a bad impression, right? In this study we are going to look at what happened when Jesus encountered Peter and some of the other disciples for the first time; we will look at what kind of impression Jesus made and observe how the disciples responded to Christ before reflecting upon our own initial encounter with Jesus.

[read John 1:35-51 & Luke 5:1-11]

Which parts of these passages stand out to you? Take some time to jot down your initial impressions of these two passages along with any questions they raise for you before sharing your thoughts with the group.

John 1:35-51	Luke 5:1-11
1. Where was Peter at spiritually when he first encountered Jesus?	1. Where were you at spiritually when you first encountered Jesus?

<p>2. What do you notice about Peter's response to Jesus in these passages?</p>	<p>2. What was your initial reaction and response to Jesus?</p>
<p>3. What do you notice about the different ways other people in these passages responded to Jesus, in particular Andrew and Nathanael?</p>	<p>3. Andrew ran to get Peter. Who influenced you in coming to know Christ?</p>
<p>4. What steps does Jesus take to interact/engage with the people in the passage?</p>	<p>4. Think about someone you know who has not yet responded to Jesus; what issues do you think are stumbling blocks to faith for this person? How do you think they would respond to Jesus?</p>

Additional passages to read if you're feeling keen; Psalm 139, 1 Peter 2:9, The training of the Twelve, A. B. Bruce

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2. PROBLEMS WITH JESUS

A Scottish anecdote: Heather's flat mate would not stop asking her questions about her faith, Heather felt like she was constantly trying to belittle her beliefs; every other day she would raise some deeply philosophical issue that Heather couldn't address and this made Heather feel very ignorant. The questions her flat mate raised began to wear Heather down and before long she had several doubts about her own faith. Eventually Heather decided that her faith was too important to her to completely abandon and so instead, with God's help, she began to look for some answers. This was a time consuming process but it was well worth it since Heather began to develop some personal convictions about her faith. In the end Heather actually wrote to her flat mate and thanked her for helping her to understand her faith more deeply!

Questions and doubts seem to be a natural part of our faith journey; Peter clearly does not understand everything about Jesus and yet he still followed him(John 6:68). In this weeks study we are going to look at what we do when we struggle with questions and doubts about Jesus.

[read John 6:25-70]

Which parts of this passage stands out to you? Take some time to jot down your initial impressions of this passage along with any questions it raises for you before sharing your thoughts with the group.

<p>1. Why do you think the Jews are so offended by what Jesus is saying in this passage? Have a look at Exodus 16:4.</p>	<p>1. What teachings about Christ do you find hard to accept?</p>
<p>2. What do you notice about the way the Jews responded to this hard teaching in verses 41-43?</p>	<p>2. Think back to the last time you really struggled with aspect of your faith? How did you respond? Who was the first person you talked to about it?</p>
<p>3. What is different about the way Peter responds? What does this tell us about Peter?</p>	<p>3. If a Christian friend of yours was struggling with some difficult questions what advice could you give them?</p>

3. PROBLEMS WITH US

Sometimes it is difficult to “keep on keeping on” with God if we feel we have let God down too many times, however Peter is famous for letting Jesus down (John 18:15-18,25-27) and yet this failure did not stop God from using Peter, on the contrary, God chooses Peter to be the rock of his church! In this weeks study we will look at how Jesus deals with Peter’s weaknesses and failures and consider what this might mean for us when we fail and mess up.

[read John 21]

Which parts of this passage stands out to you? Take some time to jot down your initial impressions of this passage along with any questions it raises for you before sharing your thoughts with the group.

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<p>1. How did Peter respond to Jesus questioning his love multiple times?</p>	<p>1. How do you think you would respond if Jesus questioned you about your love for him three times?</p>
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<p>2. Despite pointing out Peter's weaknesses, Jesus gives him a mission for the rest of his life and calls Peter to follow him. How do you think this would have affected Peter?</p>	<p>2. Do you feel qualified to serve God despite your weaknesses? [Read 2Corith 4:7 & 2Corinth 12:9,]</p>
<p>3. What does Peter turn his attention to directly after Jesus has just commissioned him in verse 20? What do you make of this?</p>	<p>3. Think about times when you have compared yourself with others, what effect did this have on you? [Read 2Corinth 10:12-15]</p>

4. How does Jesus respond to Peter's questions about John?

4. Think about the times when you've compared yourself to others; what might help you to stay focussed on Jesus at these times?

Read 2 Peter 3-9; and discuss what we can do to live productive and effective lives for Christ?