

# ON A MISSION

**M. Scott Peck** in his bestseller, "The Road Less Travelled" began with the simple statement; "Life is difficult". Eventually most people come to accept this. But while life is difficult, for the majority it is also bearable and can at times be quite satisfying. Without a *greater vision of life* most people simply settle down (or party-up) and make the most of their 70+ years on planet earth. Some do better than others. Many don't do very well at all.

Into this scene and into human history enters the Bible with a very different story-line. The Bible also says life is difficult but it gives us another take on what life is about, a much bigger picture, a *greater vision of life*. The Bible is a book of hope and realism. It doesn't gloss over the difficulties. Sometimes it reads like a newspaper court report, or the international news, or a tabloid celebrity scandal, but there is an unmistakable whispered message throughout - "*Life was never meant to be like this. Life can be so different.*" It is a message that eventually reaches its crescendo with the life and message of Jesus - at a Jewish festival He shouts out, "*If you are thirsty, come to me and drink! Have faith in me, and you will have life-giving water flowing from deep inside you, just as the Scriptures say.*" John 7:38, 39

This is the Goodnews. There **IS** another way to live, a way of living deeply and fully, and **GOD IS ON A MISSION** to bring this Good News to all of us. Furthermore he wants us to play a part in passing it on.

## Outline of the series

1. *The Good News*: What is this good news and how does it make a difference?
2. *God's People in Action*: How do we work *together* to make this 'gospel difference'?
3. *Passing it on*: How does all this apply to *my world* to practically make a difference?

## SECTION ONE: THE GOOD NEWS

In this section we ask, "What is this good news and how does it make a difference?"

- Study One - Where Are We?
- Study Two - Where Is God?
- Study Three - What difference does Jesus Make?

# WHERE ARE WE?

There is much that is good to celebrate in life. The bible says God “richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Tim 6:17); He “causes his sun to shine on the just and the unjust” (Matt 5:45); “He gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and fills us with food and *joyful hearts*”. (Acts 14:17) Clearly God has made life on the planet earth more than bearable. But he has done much more than this, he has uniquely stamped human beings with aspects of his very own nature (Gen 1:27, 28). We have a deeply implanted moral sense (Rom 2:15) and an appetite for intimacy, beauty and adventure. So we discover pleasing echoes of God within ourselves and in our relationships with others and in the world around us. This leaves us longing for more.

But just as surely as there is a taste of goodness there is also an unmistakable sour taste; a *dark shadow* is cast over human life. We sense it everywhere. Something is wrong. Frederick Buechner refers to this as the loss of our “shimmering self” (God’s Image):

*“Our original shimmering self gets buried so deep we hardly live out of it at all ...rather, we learn to live out of all the other selves we are constantly putting on and taking off like coats and hats against the world’s weather.”*

In Genesis 3:9, God asked Adam the simple question, “Where are you?” God, of course, knew exactly where Adam was - he was in a bit of “pickle”, but he wanted Adam to realise this. In this study we will take a good look at *where we are*. We are interested in the shadow cast over our lives. In particular we are asking two questions, “What is the *nature* of this shadow? What is the *cause* of this shadow in our experience?”

## **Our Friends at Uni**

Take a few minutes to think about your friends and classmates at Uni. How do they answer the question, “Where Are We?” How do they think about and handle life’s difficulties? Ask God to bring two of three people to mind. (You could begin praying for them). Think about their relationships, their approach to uni work, what they talk about, how they spend their time, money and energy.

What is important to them?

Where are they struggling? What are the ‘shadows’ in their lives?

How do they *account* for the difficulties they and those around them experience?

How are they *coping* with these difficulties?



## **People Jesus Met**

It is easy to absorb, uncritically, prevailing explanations and solutions regarding life’s difficulties. If we are not careful our whole approach to life can become indistinguishable from the non-believers around us. We need another set of eyes to see ourselves the way God sees us. Paul, having met Jesus Christ personally said, “from now on we do not think of anyone from a *human point of view*.” 2 Cor 5:16. He had begun to see people and their struggles from *God’s point of view*. He had a new answer to the question, “Where are we?” It is vitally important if we are to help the people around us that we learn how to see them through God’s eyes, and there is no better person to teach us how to do this than Jesus Christ.

**CHOOSE ONE** of the individuals below and answer the questions following. Use the descriptions to make your choice based either on people you know, or on a category of persons you would like to think about. As a group figure out how many of the passages you will study.

THE STRUGGLER **John 4:1-26**

The Samaritan Woman was a bit of an outcast. She had made a mess of her life and relationships.

THE RESPECTABLE PERSON **Luke 7:36-50**

Simon the Pharisee was someone with good values and good friends, respected in his community.

THE SUCCESSFUL PERSON **Matthew 19:16-26**

The Rich Young Man was ambitious and impressive. He seemed to have it all, or did he?

THE RELIGIOUS PERSON **John 3:1-15**

Nicodemus was a man who had a very well thought through belief system.

PERSON ..... PASSAGE .....

1. What does the story reveal about this person?
2. What good, legitimate<sup>1</sup> things could this person be longing for?
3. What does Jesus expose about their beliefs and behaviour?
4. What does Jesus indicate is missing in this person's life?
5. Do you know anyone who is a bit like this person? What issues are they struggling with?

Group Discussion: From these studies what general conclusions can you draw about what Jesus sees as the real nature of the difficulties these people face? Underlying cause(s)? Solution(s)? (See also: Matthew 15:8, 18-19; John 5:39-40, John 14:6)<sup>2</sup>

## **Wrap up**

Return to your reflections on "Our Friends at Uni". What do you think Jesus would say to our contemporaries? Can you make up a short dialogue? (or monologue?)

Does this suggest ways of connecting with your friends?

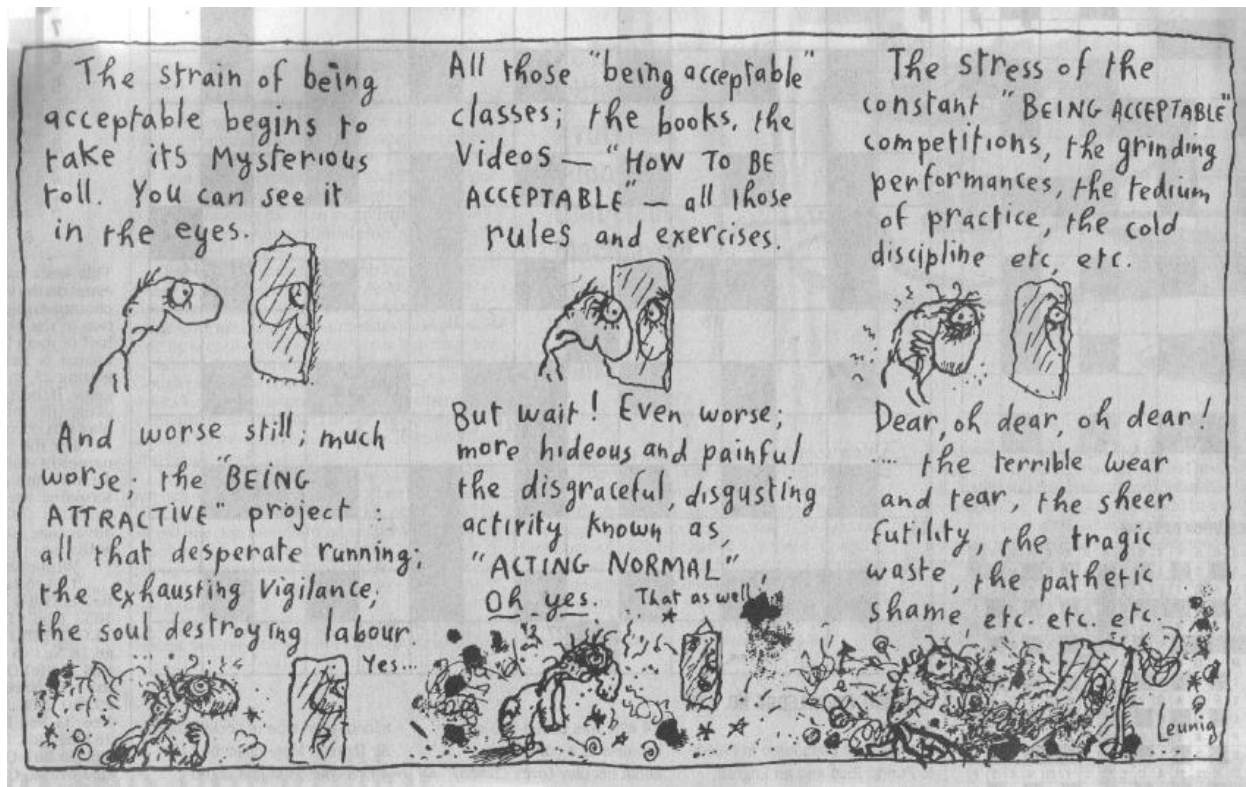
We can easily be influenced by the people around us. What has personally challenged you in this study?

Finish by spending some time together praying for people in your world. We suggest you each come up with **five people** to be praying for and thinking about throughout the On a Mission series.

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<sup>1</sup> By legitimate we mean valid, God-given desires, e.g. desires for love, security, significance, etc

<sup>2</sup> The underlying condition of the heart is further developed in Romans 8:6-8; Ephesians 2:1-5; Jeremiah 17:9,10



### Some Interesting quotes about the state of humanity:

"The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong ... the pleasures of power, of hatred. For there are two things inside of me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal Self and the Diabolical Self. The diabolical Self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute,"<sup>3</sup>

"The sickness of our culture today lies in our shallow, flippant and commercial way of dealing with the central and vital questions of our humanity. 'Our stainless-steel civilization', as it has been called, is sad and empty. The individual is doomed to live a life of quiet desperation, threatened by oblivion and only capable of living from day to day, if not, like our cousins in the Third World, from hand to mouth. Too many people today have to 'sell things' to have a job. They don't believe in what they sell, but outward appearances have to be kept up. Busyness is the modern definition of blessedness."<sup>4</sup>

"As a man has lost his true nature, anything can become his nature. Likewise, since the good is lost, any thing can be adopted as what he deems good." Pascal

"It is, after all, in our nature to suppress truth that is a threat to our egos" Soren Kierkegaard

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 94-95

<sup>4</sup> James Houston, *The Hungry Soul*, p116