

On A Mission - STUDY THREE

**WHAT DIFFERENCE
DOES JESUS MAKE?**

Now we come to the good part. What happens when a person becomes a believer? Or, in the terms of our second study, what happens when the 'prodigal returns'?

The changes Jesus makes are amazing. But do we really see and appreciate them? We easily look for God in the wrong places and are disappointed. Worse still we often take for granted, or even miss completely, the wonderful things he does - things we could celebrate and share with others. Jesus drew a sharp distinction between what he has to offer and what the world has to offer. For instance, he said, "I give you peace, the kind of peace that *only I can give*. It isn't like the peace that *this world can give*." (John 14:27). So how is the message of Jesus different? Are we clear about this? Clear enough to explain it to our friends? Are we able to spot the differences that Jesus is making to our own lives?

Exercise 1: Our Contemporaries - Messages

Our alienation from God and our spoiled hearts (Study One) leave us all really open to **messages** that solve problems and give hope.

1. What are some of the messages and promises people are hearing and responding to today?

2. Think of two or three of your friends. Can you answer the questions below?¹
 - What *particular* messages do you think they are hearing and responding to? What are they sceptical about?

 - What messages about Christianity do you think they are hearing? What fears might they have about becoming believers?

 - What do *you* think would change for them if they become believers? Try to be practical and specific.

Some messages out there:-

"What is stopping you from forming the ideal relationship; getting the perfect job; earning what you're worth? Who is making it impossible for you to have enough time, the health you desire? What's preventing you from living a life you love? You are! And you're also the one who can make that life possible."
Anne Hartley - Love the life you live.

"My definition of success is to live your life in a way that causes you to feel a ton of pleasure and very little pain - and because of your lifestyle, have the people around you feel a lot more pleasure than they do pain.

"The only limit to your impact is your imagination and commitment. Using the power of decision gives you the capacity to get past any excuse to change any and every part of your life in an instant."

"At last, at last, the past is past, I've broken free and won. And now it's time to be healthy and really have some fun!"

Tony Robbins

"At every turn are how-to happiness books, articles, TV and radio programmes, videos, and websites. Fast-growing professions include happiness counselling, happiness coaching, life-lift coaching, joyology, and happiness science. Personal happiness is the new religion and everyone is flogging it."

John F Schumaker Clinical Psychologist

¹ For discussion - How could you find out what they think? What questions could you ask?

Exercise 2: Jesus and the Bible

So what difference does Jesus really make? How is his message different to other messages that address life's challenges and difficulties? Let the lives of those he changed answer these questions. (By way of contrast, you may want to compare them with the testimonials to popular Life Coach Tony Robbins, on the right).

Choose ONE of the passages below and answer the questions following: (decide as a group who will do what)

Zacchaeus Luke 19:1-10	Samaritan Woman John 4:4-42	The Prostitute Luke 7:36-50
Levi Luke 5:27-32	Martha John 11:21-44	Paul Acts 26:4-23

(Note some of these stories spell out the changes; others invite us to use our imagination and, based on the needs Jesus addressed, to anticipate the changes that would follow. The key question we address is: what changes does Jesus really want to bring about in people's lives)

1. What needs did Jesus address in their lives? Think of both immediate presenting needs and underlying, fundamental needs? For some clues about fundamental needs consider the promises Jesus made below².
2. How did/would their encounter with Jesus have changed:
 - How they thought and felt about themselves, God and life?
 - How they lived and related to others?
3. What do you think this person would say about the difference Jesus made to their life? Write a short testimony on their behalf (c.f. the Robbins testimonies on the right).

Tony Robbins Testimonies

"My gut and my heart, everything is attracted to his (Tony Robbins) philosophies and he's so much a people person. He's been there. He's done that. He can speak from experience. He helped me believe in myself.....I can't tell you how many times I turn to Tony Robbins and his words, his inspiration, and the difference that they have made for me has been incredible."

Erin Brockovich,
Environmental Activist

"When I started listening to Tony, I started working really hard to be number one because I wanted to be the best. And Tony gave me the skills and the techniques to get there."

Marty Rodriguez, Real Estate Agent, 21st Century #1 Salesperson for 11 years

"I was able to take his techniques, specific things I haven't heard anywhere else that gave me an advantage to do what I wanted to do, and do it better and faster."

"It's going to cause you to really think in a way you've probably never thought before. It's going to wake you up, decide, and do what you love in your life."

Jorge Cruise, Fitness Trainer and best-selling author

Some of these testimonies sound disturbingly like some modern Christian testimonies! Evidences of **syncretism**?
Defn. "the combination of different systems of philosophical or religious belief or practice"?

Optional - A transformed Community Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-34

Jesus not only transforms individuals, He transforms communities. What changes do you notice in the fledgling church community? What changed *values* resulted in this new way of being together?

² Jesus' promises to meet fundamental needs: Matthew 11:28-29; 16:25; John 4:13-14; 5:24; 6:35; 7:37-38 (compare with Galatians 5:22-23); 8:12, 31, 34-36; 10:10, 28-30; 11:25, 26; 14:6, 27; 15:5, 7 16:33; Mark 1:17, Acts 1:8

Wrap Up

Write your own brief testimony to the fundamental changes Jesus has made in the way you approach life.

Do a bit of "God-spotting". What evidences can you spot of God working in your life on a day to day level?

How would communicate this to a friend, workmate or relative?

"Christianity isn't a crutch, it's a whole hospital" Greg Laurie

