

On A Mission - study eight**TAKING A FAITH RISK**

In the last study we looked at how we experience God in the everyday, including doing an exercise to help us in this. This time we have another exercise at the end of the study exploring how different aspects of the good news have affected us. But first, let us consider the topic of taking faith risks and initiatives...

Living risky lives

Life itself is a risk...because there is always the possibility of things going wrong. In fact, throughout the world's history things have continued to go horribly wrong, moving towards total destruction. God set to put things right through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. But the 'saving strategy' God chose to use was a risky one. Jesus' birth in a cowshed to a rural teenage girl set the tone for his life to come – his would be a life without the 'comforts' of an overprotective Father in heaven. Instead, Jesus' life was very human, complete with difficulties, dangers and temptations. It seems the way to redeem the brokenness of the world would require the taking of great risks.

We are called to carry on Jesus' work which will require us to take some risks too. So how does this look for us?

Some of us are more natural risk-takers than others; even so, we all make decisions which at times feel to us like risky ones. Think back over some of the risks inspired by your faith that you have taken.

- What things were 'on the line' in these decisions (eg job choices, your reputation, money, relationships...) and what things made it really hard for you to take what you believed to be the right action?

- After taking these faith risks, did you feel encouraged or discouraged to take more risks?

- What things have helped you to move beyond the difficulties so that you have been able to take faith risk decisions and actions?

Nehemiah's risky engineering project

Nehemiah discovered a problem: the wall around Jerusalem needed fixing. Although he wasn't an engineer by trade, he felt inspired to do something about it.

- Read Nehemiah ch 1-4

- What role did praying have in Nehemiah's attempt to get the project underway?

- What did teaming look like for Nehemiah and how did he set this up?

- Notice the risky conversation that Nehemiah had with the King (Neh 2:1-9). Although he was afraid, he went through and had the conversation anyway. What factors may have helped him with this?
- Nehemiah also experienced some opposition and difficulties along the way. How did he cope with this?
- As you look at Nehemiah's story, what things can you take from it that may help you as you consider taking risky faith initiatives¹?

Exercise: the good news diamond

One of the difficulties we face is knowing what difference the good news really makes for us. Intuitively we may know that, through the good news, God has been changing us for good. However, when we have to pinpoint some of the ways those changes take effect, we can struggle to give details. The following exercise is an attempt to help us identify some of the ways the good news makes a real difference for us...

The good news is like a diamond with many faces. The table over the page gives some thoughts on different aspects (or faces) that are included in the good news. No doubt, there are others. We too are people with many aspects – our different personalities, life experiences, stages of life. Given this, we should not be surprised to find that the aspects of the 'good news' that attract me are different from those that attract you; and what is 'good news' for me now is perhaps subtly different from what it was when I was younger. Even though the good news includes all of the things in the table, we feel some things more poignantly than others. Read through the table over the page and consider the questions below.

- Think back to when you first experienced the reality of the good news of Jesus. What were significant aspects of the good news that attracted you then? (they may be some of the things mentioned above or something else)
- How did this change things for you in your life? (eg a changed perspective on how you viewed life, the way you related to people, direction-changing decisions...)

¹ The following passages may also help you consider lessons to learn: 1Sam 14:1-23, Acts 13:1-3, Hebrews ch11

- For you at present, which aspects of the good news are particularly meaningful?

- How is this current experience of the good news working its way out into the way you think, feel, relate and/or act?

- In your group, discuss some of these specifics of how the good news is (or has in the past been) impacting you. It is important to exercise our 'faith language' in this way, so be prepared to give each other helpful feedback on how we come across.

- Pray for opportunities to talk with your friends about this and be prepared to take some faith risks!

Aspects of the good news diamond

| Good News is... | NOT... | What it means | NT examples |
|--------------------------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| Hope | despair | A better future in this life and the next, where death no longer holds power as the ultimate ending; also, with hope we are able to move towards redeeming what seems hopelessly broken (eg relationships) | Lk 23:39-43 Jn 11:21-44 |
| Belonging | Alone or loneliness | Solitary confinement drives people insane, and yet too many suffer their own personal isolation. Life was meant to be lived in community. God gives us a sense of belonging – we all rightfully belong in this world, it is not owned by the rich and powerful. God's acceptance of us opens the door for our acceptance of each other – a powerful force for good | Mk 5:24-34 |
| Ability to change | Being stuck in helpless repeating patterns | We all recognise aspects of ourselves that we don't like, but it is so hard to change things. The good news offers us power to be transformed – slowly but surely, not in surface issues but in deep ways that really matter | Jn 4:9-26 |
| Contentment & peace | Restless searching for more | We search for meaning happiness & a sense of accomplishment. We spend our lives pursuing the many things that promise (\$, job, beautiful house, beautiful clothes...) but ultimately none deliver. The good news offers a contentment that money cant buy | Lk 19:1-10 |
| A life of value | worthlessness | People & 'the system' have a way of making us feel lowly valued. But we are greatly valued by God: we're not losers or hopeless – we are special. And that is good news. | Lk 5:27-32 |
| Love | Indifference or hate | Hate is the extreme form, but indifference or apathy is more common – a not caring enough to even get angry | Mk 1:40-42 |
| Meaning & purpose | Chaos & rat race | Life without purpose is death; we need to be able to make sense of life, otherwise there appears to be no point to anything. Meaning & order are crucial | Mk 5:1-20 |
| Forgiveness | Guilt | Guilt is a crippling weight that often goes unarticulated. We experience the pain of knowing we have done wrong, but are unable to do anything to make that pain go away apart from trying to shut it out (which we can do for a while, but not forever). Forgiveness comes from the One who has ultimately been wronged; if God says we are forgiven then we are truly free from the weight of that burden. Gaining forgiveness is more freeing than being let out of a prison – don't underestimate its positive effect on us even now. | Jn 8:3-11 Mk 2:1-12 |
| Healing | Brokenness | We have all experienced brokenness and carry around various forms of pain and handicap. God is able to take our brokenness and make something of beauty and meaning out of it. In the good news the healing process has begun. | Jn 9:1-7 |

End of study 8