

On A Mission - study nine

EXPLAINING WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

In the previous 2 studies we looked at how we experience God in the everyday (*Study 7*) and taking initiatives inspired by our faith (*Study 8*). In this last study of the section we focus on communicating the *content* of the message itself – because as we talk about our own experience of God and take initiatives with our friends, we will face the inevitable question “so what exactly do you believe?”

Is that what you believe?

To begin, think back to a few specific occasions when someone has asked you about what you believe (*note: they may not have stated it as explicitly as ‘what do you believe?’ but this was their intention.*)

- How easy did you find it to describe what it is you believe?

- Did you describe your faith in the same way on the different occasions? Why or why not?

- What do you think are some important beliefs to communicate about your faith in Jesus?

Stories of the kingdom

In general, Jesus chose to tell lots of stories to illustrate what the kingdom of God is like rather than make ‘doctrinal type’ statements. Read Mat 13:24-52¹ and consider the questions to help you think about any implications of his approach for us.

- What do you notice about the images and settings Jesus uses in these stories?

- What do you think were some of the messages that Jesus was trying to get across in these particular stories?

- How important do you think it is that none of Jesus’ stories on their own tells everything there is to tell about the ‘kingdom’?

¹ For more ‘kingdom’ stories in Matthew’s gospel, read Mat 18:21-35; 20:1-16; 22:1-14; 25:1-46

- Jesus spoke lots in parables ('the kingdom of God is like...') Do you think the message would have been easier to understand if Jesus had been more explicit and to the point rather than using imagery and stories? Why or why not?
- As you consider the way Jesus presented the kingdom of God, what things can you take from this that may help you communicate the content of our message?

Exercise: our own stories of the kingdom

When you are familiar with a subject, it is easier to use technical jargon to communicate, because without technical terms it would take a lot longer and a lot more words to say what you want to say. Our problem, however, is that we are trying to communicate with those who *aren't* familiar with our 'Christian' subject. So, our audience either doesn't understand our jargon words, or they think those words mean something different from what we mean by them.

These exercises are aimed at helping us move beyond using jargon to instead practise using images and concepts from our common everyday world. Have fun expanding your communication of the good news!

1. **Pick an object** from your everyday world that reminds you of some aspect of following Jesus. Bring your item along to the group (if practical to do so) and explain it's meaning. Give each other helpful feedback on how understandable the symbol and explanation are.
e.g. a CD: a physical CD is small and two dimensional and yet there is much more to it than meets the eye (music, information, photos). In the same way, there is much more to us than meets the eye. God made us to live lives of great depth; to live superficial lives – focusing on the externals of how we look and what stuff we have – is to miss out on the purpose of living
2. **Choose a film or book or event** you've been to recently that give some insights into following Jesus. Again, in your group give your explanation of how the book/film/event sheds light on the good news.
e.g. *A birthday party*: heaven is like a family birthday party, because it's a celebration of who you are as a member of the family, not what you have or haven't achieved.
3. **Describe an experience** you have had that brought an important aspect of God's kingdom home to you.
e.g. *A near miss*: Caused time to stand still while my life flashed before me and made me reflect on important relationships.

Wrap Up

- To conclude, note down any things you feel God has challenged you on or encouraged you with and **any things you need to do** as a result.
- **Organise to pray with some friends you could partner with.** Together, pray for faith initiatives you could take or already are taking with your friends.

End of study 9