

DAY 1 - (week beginning 11 March 2019)**Read - Matthew 4:18-25**

"Come, follow Me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed Him." vs 19 & 20

I love the fact that there was no initial spiritual conversion of these fishermen disciples. One can't actually say that they even believed in Jesus, initially. Yet, they knew He had something they wanted and belief came over the next three years. They followed with their questions and doubts. They decided to find out more, to get close, to watch and listen. We need to give opportunities to friends and family members to investigate who Jesus is. A good way to do this is to invite them to attend an 'Alpha Course' with you, where they can ask questions and grow in understanding and knowledge.

Perhaps one of the saddest things for me is that so many Christians think that 'following Jesus' means obeying a long list of rules, and that it is a burdensome and difficult task. On the contrary, following Jesus requires us to be in a constant state of surrender and openness to His leading. It is not passive, but it is a state of peace and rest. In Matthew 11:26-30 Jesus says: *"Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me. For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, please help me to see that You have truly accepted me as Your friend and follower. Help me to realise that I cannot earn your love and acceptance - it is a gift. Please give me the rest and peace my spirit longs for. I am Yours and You are mine. Thank You, my Friend.*

DAY 2**Read - Luke 5:1-11**

"Master," Simon answered, "we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets." vs 5

Simon Peter's words are an echo of Jesus' mother, Mary's, words at the Wedding at Cana. *"His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." John 2:1-11*

My husband's catchphrase this year is the same as the well-known takkie advert's: - "JUST DO IT!" He believes, as all Christ followers should, that this is the secret to discipleship. As we learn to live in the presence of God, loving Him and listening to Him, we begin to become aware of His prompting and guiding. A name pops into our minds, for example, and we feel the need to phone or visit, and we discover that this was the answer to a desperate prayer. I saw this quote recently: "Someone, somewhere, is depending on you to do what God has called you to do". The joy of discovering that the Almighty, Omnipotent, most Powerful God of the Universe chooses to use you to bless others and change their lives, is an overwhelming and humbling experience!

It is tragic when we simply add God (as a helpful accessory) to our already busy lives instead of allowing Him to transform our lives. Yes, sometimes that means our lives get turned upside down, but what a "glory He sheds on our way! ... Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey".

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, teach me to discover the joy of listening, trusting and obeying Your prompting. I look forward, with anticipation, to You using me.*

DAY 3**Read - Luke 10:1-16**

"He told them: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field." vs 2

We are called to be witnesses to those around us. you know that the "harvest" Jesus was talking about is those who need Him and need someone to introduce them to Him. It is our responsibility to be the ones who bring others to Jesus.

There is almost nothing more damaging to the Kingdom of God, than an insensitive, over-enthusiastic "Bible-punching" new Christian! I cringe when I come across this, as I imagine others have cringed at times, at my insensitive words. The most effective form of witnessing is 'friendship evangelism' - where we come alongside others and show, through our loving actions and kindness, that Jesus is relevant and is the answer to their needs.

Perhaps we should ask Jesus to give us His vision of the 'fields' which are ready for 'harvesting'. We need to be made aware of the many people all around us who have a longing for the answers we have found. If we truly believed that we have discovered the most meaningful, purposeful direction to our lives through Jesus, why don't we want to share this with those we care about? We should realise that coming to 'Church' is not relevant to some people. As the Church, we should be bringing Jesus "out on the road" to where people actually congregate!

Prayer: *Help me, Father God, to see that those around me need You. Help me to love them enough to talk to them about You.*

DAY 4

Read - Luke 8:22-25

"As they sailed, He fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger". vs 23

How wonderful to believe that when everything is going well in our lives, the Lord is blessing us, but how terrible to think that when things go wrong, God has abandoned us!

The Christ-follower learns that 'storms' are part of life. We dealt with this in more detail, recently, in the "Renewing of the Mind" theme. Trials are opportunities for us to be stretched and to mature in our walk with Jesus. Our response to these trials is what either opens us to, or shuts us off from, God's blessing. It is very hard to deal with prayers which seem to be unanswered and tragedies which we believe God could have prevented. As followers of Christ, we know that these questions we ask do not have answers here on earth. We do know, however, that *"in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers... will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord"* Romans 8:37-39. For Paul, this was a living reality as he experienced suffering first-hand on many occasions.

There are many former Christians who have 'fallen by the way-side' because they encountered hypocrisy, hurt or disappointment. Let us encourage one another to not give up.

Prayer: Give me the courage, oh Lord, to trust You when the stresses and storms of life hit me.

DAY 5

Read - Matthew 25:31-46

"..I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink" vs 35

One of the things we learn when we read the Gospels is that Jesus was much more interested in the poor and unnoticed people than he was in the rich and popular ones. The reading I chose for today is one of Jesus' most uncomfortable sermons. The parable of the rich man and the beggar (Luke 16:19-31) is also hard to read. It is not possible to be a follower of Jesus if we ignore His passion for those who are poor.

We are challenged every day by the desperate plight of the poor and needy in our country. We cannot help everyone, but we are called to help those we can. It's our attitude that Jesus is most interested in. Do we drive past destitute folk with disinterest, or are our hearts moved with compassion? Yes, we will be taken advantage of; yes, our intentions will be misunderstood; yes, we will meet with ingratitude and worse, but still we go on loving, giving, helping and caring wherever and whenever we can. This is the way of the Christ follower.

Celebrity Christians who proclaim that it is a sign of God's blessing that they are rich, need to guard their hearts against arrogance. We hear Jesus say: *"...From everyone who is given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."* Luke 12:48b

Prayer: Almighty God, "break my heart for what breaks Yours". Help me to have Your compassion.

DAY 6

Read - John 14:1-14

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In My Father's house are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you". vs 1&2

The single truth that encourages me the most as I seek to follow Jesus, is the fact that Heaven is my true home. As much as I love my life on earth with my fabulous family and friends, and I love the beauty of this world the Lord created, I know, without a doubt that God has so much more in store for me.

The fact that I have been given "Eternal Life" (John 3:16) through Jesus' sacrifice, gives me hope, courage and peace.

When Jesus was suffering unimaginable pain, physically, emotionally and spiritually, He spoke with compassion to the man on the cross next to Him and told him: *"I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise."* Luke 23:43. I am sure that this fact, this 'truth', encouraged Jesus in those terrible hours on the cross.

How glorious it is for us to know that, as Jesus said: *"They (we) are not of the world, even as I am not of it."* John 17:16

I have quoted Rick Warren before, he says this life is a "temporary assignment". We rise above the hardships of this life because we know there is more, so much more. We do not fear death.

Prayer: "... on that day when my strength is failing, the end draws near, and my time has come; still my soul will sing Your praise unending: 10 000 years and then forever more!" Matt Redman