

Living His Story: week two

## **Catching Up with God – Responding to God’s Initiative in evangelism**

### **Feedback from last week:**

Ian Noble sent some feedback from last week:

*Hi Ashley*

*During this evening I’ve been reflecting on the great joy of love and loving. I’ve been blessed with two daughters and four granddaughters whom I love dearly and that love brings such joy. I frequently like to whisper privately in each one’s ear ‘I love you’. I like to think this contributes to their sense of security and it certainly builds a lovely bond between us.*

*Maybe evangelism is about telling our neighbours that they are loved.*

*God bless*

*Ian*

I replied, *‘I rather suspect you are onto something.’*

### **Prayer**

**When did you last hear God whisper ‘I love you’ in your ear?**

**The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.**

**The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.**

**And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son (my daughter), whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’**

**Jesus looked at him and loved him.**

**Father, please never stop telling us that you love us. It is truth for the core of our being, it centres us in you, it’s the reality which captures our whole vision and outlook on life and for this we are so thankful... and we have known your kindness to us today.**

**God of love bless us this evening. Amen**

**This week we are looking at the wonderful truth that sharing faith is all about joining in with what God is already doing. Here is a short extract from the book ‘Living His Story’.**

*Jesus himself told a story about an urgent and compelling invitation. In Luke 14.15–24 we read the story of a man who prepares a lavish banquet. But on the day when his guests are supposed to arrive, one by one they make their excuses not to attend. Angered by this response, the master instead commands his servant to go into the town and bring in anyone he can find, including those who are not normally invited to such prestigious gatherings.*

*Parables such as these would have been shocking to Jesus' listeners, particularly the religious who considered themselves safely on the list of those invited. Through these parables, Jesus asks who are the recipients of this good news and suggests that it is not the prestigious and important people, those who simply assume they are invited. Jesus' extraordinary kingdom prioritized the poor, the neglected, those who didn't think they stood a chance.*

### What dents our willingness to invite-in those who are not like us in whatever way?

**Feedback:** All muted, so perhaps one from each group can unmute and speak.

#### **Some more from the book:**

In theological terms, this conviction is often expressed as *missio Dei*, a Latin phrase meaning 'the mission or sending of God'. This concept was articulated at a conference on mission in 1932 by the theologian Karl Barth. This signified a move away from understanding mission as something that the church did in response to God's action, and instead reimagined mission as rooted primarily in God's being and his intention in the world. The term *missio Dei* was later formed and identifies God himself as the initiator of mission rather than the Church or any other Christian organization. While mission is far broader than evangelism and encompasses the scope of the Church's presence and action in the world, such as social justice and environmental concern, the call upon the Church to witness is an integral part of its mission. Understanding mission as primarily rooted in the nature and purpose of God means also that evangelism is not **our** clever idea or a calculated response to try and boost church membership during a period of decline. Evangelism finds its rationale and origin in the love of God for the world, and this theme bubbles over in many of Jesus' parables. These parables tell us about three lost things (a sheep, a coin and a son).

In these stories Jesus teaches the religious leaders, who chastise him (as they do on several occasions) for his questionable choice of dinner guests, that God's love is for the lost, the least and even the lawbreaker. In so doing, he challenges them that they should not be surprised that the Messiah acts in this way. God's love is and has always been for such as these.

#### **A case in point**

Last week I shared that I had started volunteering at the Hub as a Buddy Walker – and I meet Brian each Tuesday morning to walk and talk for an hour – something which Helen Edwards can testify to as she passed us on her bike today.

I have this clear sense that the deal is that I have signed up to give an extremely lonely man an hour a week as a listening ear, a friend, a support to help deliver him from his loneliness. I would like to think that I achieve that each week.

I also consider that Brian, who's past almost entirely dominates his present reality, and who has almost no capacity to imagine a positive future needs healing, release, freedom and actually he needs a relationship with God.

But, it's not for me to convert Brian – that is God's work alone.

He's working in Brian I take what I think are God's queues to speak about faith but that is a small part of our conversation.

Today Brian asked me about my working life – so now the cat is out of the bag. In fact the conversation went:

**Me:**            **And then I left my work in the bank in London and trained to be a minister in the church.**

**Brian:**        **So does that mean you are a Christian?**

**Me:**            **Yeah, it does.**

**Brian:**        **... Jesus!**

**(I'm praying that Brian will come to realise the irony of his use of that word.)**

**Have you ever caught yourself thinking you were not fully appreciated for who you are?**

**In what ways do we assess people's status, rights, importance.**

**When and who do we invite to our dinner tables people who are 'not like us'?**

### **Changing our mind**

In January I read a book by a Christian writer, the book was called **Changing Our Mind.**

Birthday coming up – I can't possibly be 56 – James O'Brien 'How Not To Be Wrong' all about the fact that he had felt it his job as a Radio phone in host to destroy other people, their views and with his not inconsiderable intellect demonstrate why he was right.

But in the book he explores where that attitude in him came from and then looked at all the ways that he has changed his mind on issues – and how that has happened. Why is a culture which is increasingly binary 'black and white' and where social media puts us in an echo chamber 'where we just hear our own views repeated back to us' its increasingly difficult to change one's mind.

There's a Bible word for that:

**metanoia** - change in one's way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion.

"what he demanded of people was metanoia, repentance, a complete change of heart"

Of course in Christian circles there are extra layers of complexity to the idea of changing one's mind. (James O'Brien is a Christian.)

**how difficult it can be to change our mindS on something and if this does happen, how?**

Here is a final extract from the book:

*Central to the idea of evangelism is this simple yet profound theological truth: God loves. Any understanding of evangelism that takes its starting point from anywhere else can so easily become coercive, manipulative or purely pragmatic. The overarching narrative of Scripture is that God loves people. Evangelism, then, finds its ultimate motivation not in the crisis of a church in decline that needs to act in order to prevent its own extinction. Evangelism is always only and ever because God is love. Our witnessing, therefore, is only ever in response to the invitation that God has already made.*

### **Blessing**

May the Father of Life pour out His grace on you; may you feel His hand in everything you do and be strengthened by the things He brings you through: this is my prayer for you.

May the Son of God be Lord in all your ways; may He shepherd you the length of all your days, and in your heart may He receive the praise: this is my prayer for you.

And despite how simple it may sound, I pray that His grace will abound and motivate everything you do; and may the fullness of His love be shared through you.

May His Spirit comfort you, and make you strong, may He discipline you gently when you're wrong, and in your heart may He give you a song: this is my prayer for you.

May Jesus be Lord in all your ways, may He shepherd you the length of all your days, and in your heart may He receive the praise: this is my prayer for you, my prayer for you.