

Lenten Study:

“Questioning Our Grip on the Cross”



Study 6

Time to get personal: Jesus and you

NOTE: Please privately engage with this study BEFORE the group session

Lenten Study: *Questioning Our Grip on the Cross*

PRELIMINARY NOTES

This Lenten Study has been prepared for use in study groups at Blackwood Uniting Church and other interested groups. It is hoped that engaging with this study series will, in some small way, lead to a deepening of understanding and an enlivening of personal faith.

It has been my observation that there are some people for whom reflection on their beliefs and understanding of the Christian faith seems not to be so terribly important, so focussed are they on compassionately *living* their faith, through acts of service and love. If you are in that category, all I ask is that I continue to be permitted to sit at your feet and to learn from, and be inspired by, the ways of your heart.

It is my view that Christian practices, including engaging in studies such as this, are valuable insofar as they contribute to our change and growth as human beings, better enabling us to engage positively with the world, and lovingly and compassionately with those around us. Whether this study contributes in such a way remains to be seen, but...*one lives in hope!*

A word about the reflection questions that accompany each study. Please consider these as suggestive, rather than prescriptive. They are not questions which I'm expecting you to answer like it's some sort of exam! Some of the questions I have raised may be questions that also come to *your* mind. Some questions may not have occurred to you, and you may deem them worthy of exploration. Other questions may have no interest or relevance to you at all.

To the extent that the questions are helpful in facilitating discussion in your group, or sparking your own thoughts, use them. Otherwise consider them of no account.

TWO WAYS OF ENGAGING WITH THE STUDY SERIES:

Study documents and YouTube video clips

Study participants have two ways in which they can engage with the study materials. Firstly, there are the printed studies, which are also available as downloadable PDF documents that can be viewed on your computer, tablet or smartphone. Secondly, there are YouTube videos for each of the seven studies. It is hoped that these two study media will complement each other, but either can be used separately too.

How each group approaches the study is, of course, up to them. I would anticipate, however, that it may be helpful for a study group to first watch together the YouTube video for the particular week's study, and then discuss the study, using the printed/PDF study notes as a reference. The links to the downloadable PDF files and to the YouTube videos can be found at:

<http://blackwooduc.org.au/downloads/studies/lentenstudy2022>

I hope that you appreciate this study series *Questioning Our Grip on the Cross*.

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Lenten Study: *Questioning Our Grip on the Cross*

It is time to get *personal*...

This study will be very different to those that have preceded it.

We will be leaving behind everything we have covered.

We will be setting aside...

Collective and statistical assessments of Christian behaviour...

Generalities and commentaries on Christian behaviour...

Theologies, doctrines and dogma...

Philosophies...

And...ideas and concepts that have been raised in this study itself...

It is now time to get *personal*.

This study will be about nothing else but...***Jesus and you.***

And so, allow *me* to get personal.

After sharing many concepts, thoughts, hypotheticals, challenges and theologies with you, allow me to get personal.

I find that much Christian theology, especially Fall-Salvation theology, leaves me bewildered and quite disconnected. So many theological, doctrinal or dogmatic expositions of “salvation” leave me either incredulous or horrified. I cannot “see” God and salvation in so much of what I hear in Christian theology and doctrine.

Where I see and experience God and salvation is in the personal.

I can *see* and *hear* salvation in the words of the hymn *Amazing Grace*:

Amazing grace
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

John Newton, a former slave trader who once treated fellow human beings as subhuman, through the grace of God, was indeed saved. *Yes!* I can see salvation in *that* life!

I can *see* salvation in the life of a friend, Albert, sadly passed away much too young: an admitted former criminal and drug addict who, through the grace of God, was saved and whose radiant spirit shone through his eyes. *Yes!* I can see salvation in such a life!

Where and how do *you* see salvation? Where and how do *you* see Jesus?

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Your personal experience of Jesus and salvation

This study will be simple and unadorned, and very personal. In it, I simply invite you to reflect on the following. This reflection, as previously advised, is best done prior to the group session.

Who is Jesus to you?

What does Jesus mean to you?

How has the fact that Jesus lived and died and, according to the gospel record, rose again influenced, and continue to influence, your life?

What significance has Jesus' life, ministry and teaching for you?

What does salvation mean to you?

What significance has Jesus' death on the cross for you?

What significance has Jesus' resurrection for you?

That's it.

That's the study.

For some individuals, these reflective questions will be all that is required.

For some individuals, these reflective questions will serve as an invitation into a quiet space that is beyond denominational theologies and doctrinal statements, beyond what you were taught in Sunday School and beyond what you have heard preached from the pulpit.

For some individuals, the above questions will be enough for you to enter into a meditative and reflective space containing only...*Jesus and you.*

Some people, however, may benefit from a little more reflective structure than offered by these simple questions. If this describes you, then I have created, in what follows, something I've called, in a nod to the Roman Catholic Stations of the Cross, ***Stations of the Christ***.

These ***Stations of the Christ*** can be regarded as metaphorical "rooms" that you may enter or not, depending on whether that particular station resonates with you or not. You can choose to sit and dwell in that space for a time, reflecting on what is raised in that station. Use these stations if they assist your reflection, but not otherwise.

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Stations of the Christ

Station 1: Silence

*In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place,
and there he prayed
(Mark 1:35)*

Find a quiet location where you won't be disturbed.

Turn your phone off or to silent.

Sit comfortably.

Close your eyes.

Focus for a time upon your breathing: in and out

When your thoughts drift, gently bring your focus back to your breath

As your mind slows down, ponder the following:

What if Jesus was sitting next to you, right now, in the silence?

What would you hear when you stop speaking and listen?

What does Jesus say to you?

How does God speak to you in the silence?

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Stations of the Christ

Station 2: Jesus-Who is He?

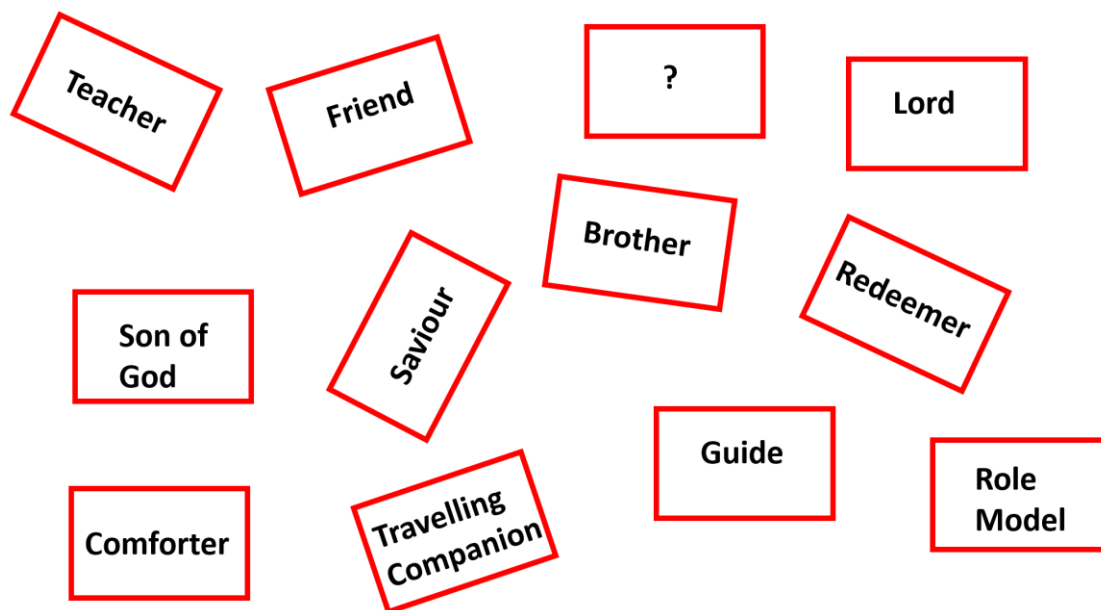
In this station, when you enter, you see a series of cards.

Each card has a word or words written upon it.

You pick up each card in turn and read it.

Which card or cards describes who Jesus is for you?

Reflect on the reasons for your choice of card(s).



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Stations of the Christ

Station 3: Salvation

Reflect upon the following:

What meaning has salvation for *you*?

Are *you* saved?

If you don't respond "yes" to whether you have been saved, might another word better describe your relationship to God/Jesus? (e.g. "loved" or "accepted")

If you resonate with a word other than "saved" what significance has this word for your relationship with God, with others, with life, and with your deepest self?

If you are saved, *what* or *whom* has saved you?

If Jesus has saved you, *in what way* has he saved you?

What have you been saved *from*?

What have you been saved *for*?

Is this salvation *complete* or is it *ongoing*?

Do you experience this salvation *individually* or *collectively* with others?

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Stations of the Christ

Station 4: Transformation

*And we all, who with unveiled faces
contemplate the Lord's glory, are being
transformed into his image with ever-
increasing glory, which comes from the
Lord, who is the Spirit
(2 Corinthians 3:18)*



As you have aged and matured, what has changed with how you see faith and life?

As you have aged and matured, what has changed in you?

Can you identify any transformative moments in your life?

Has transformation for you been more a gradual, almost imperceptible thing, or instead a series of major shifts in your consciousness and being?

Can you identify “calls” to transformation at different points of your life?

Did you respond to that call or was it too difficult to respond?

Can you discern transformation going on within you now?

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Stations of the Christ

Station 5: Mystical Union

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me (Galatians 2:19-20)

We have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16)

“Truly I tell you, just as you (did or) did not do it to one of the least of these, you (did or) did not do it to me” (Matthew 25)

*The Universal Christ:
“Another name for everything”
(Richard Rohr)*

In the beginning was Meaning, and Meaning was with God, and Meaning was God. Meaning was in the beginning with God....and Meaning became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth (John 1)



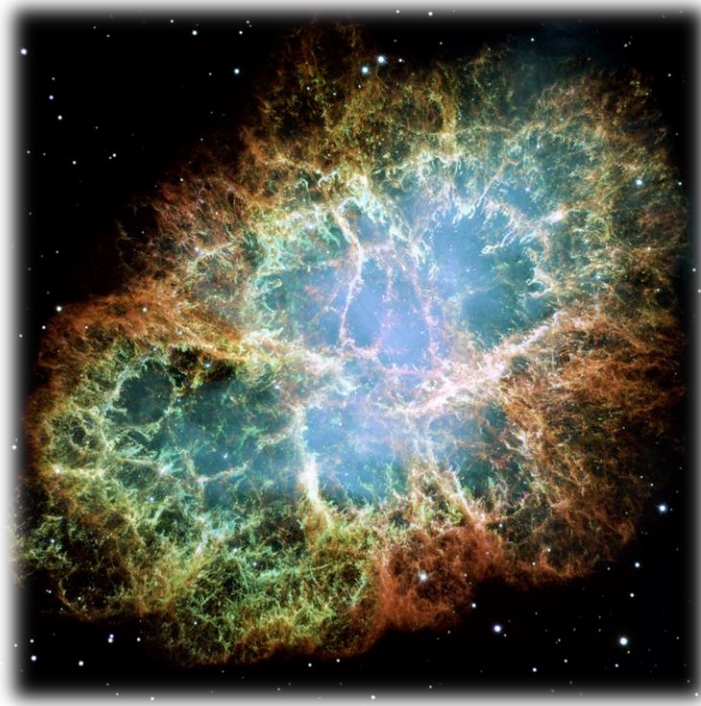
There have been mystics in all religious faiths, including the Christian faith.
Mystics perceive a oneness to existence.
Mystics perceive the interconnection between all things.
Mystics experience individuality, but also the relationality that connects us.

Sit for a moment and consider...

You are a temporary and marvellous co-location of atoms.
Some of the very atoms that comprise you were once in the body of Jesus.
Some of the oxygen atoms you inhale in this moment were once breathed by Jesus.
Your extraordinary brain has taken some 14 billion years of cosmic evolution.
You are connected in time and space to this cosmic history.
In you, the universe has become self-aware.
In you, the universe contemplates existence and meaning.
In you, the universe ponders purpose.

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We humans exist so often within the illusion of separateness.
We perceive ourselves as separate from each other.
We perceive ourselves as separate from nature.
We perceive ourselves as separate from God.
We perceive ourselves as separate from meaning.



And Meaning (*logos*) became flesh and lived among us.
And Meaning showed us how to live and to love each other.
And Meaning died on the cross.
But the cross could not end Meaning.
And violence could not defeat love
For Meaning rose again.
Because love never fails
And Meaning is, and will forever be with, God.

And when I “die” my little deaths
Do I really die?
Do my ego’s deaths end me?
Or do these little deaths birth new life?
When I try but fail to fashion purpose
Then realise with wonder
That Meaning lives in me

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Stations of the Christ

Station 6: The Cross



When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:30)

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.
(When I Survey the Wondrous Cross)*

When you look upon the cross of Jesus, *what do you see?*
Tragedy? Purpose? Salvation?

When you look upon the cross of Jesus, *what do you see?*
A life? A death? A rebirth?

When you look upon the cross
of Jesus, *what do you see?*
Violence? Sacrifice? Love?

When you look upon the cross
of Jesus, *what do you see?*
Despair? Hope?

When you look upon the cross
of Jesus, *what do you see?*

