

# BELONG

From time to time, stories emerge that an expensive artwork has been exposed a forgery or fake. For people with no specialist knowledge, it would be difficult to identify whether a work is genuine or not.<sup>1</sup>

Last week we looked at Romans 12, including what genuine Christian relationships and service look like. In this last study about membership, we look at the theme of 'true' or 'authentic' discipleship. In John 8, Jesus talked to a group of Jews who had only just 'believed' in him, challenging their attitudes and motives. Jesus, as God's Son, listens to his Father and does his will. If we are true children of God, we also have to listen to his teaching, make a place for God's word and that should convert to a life of obedience.

**ICEBREAKER:** Go around your group and ask:

- Firstly - what is the dominant media influence in your life and/ or home? TV? Netflix? A particular podcast? A particular social media site? Other?
- What is the dominant message that you get from that source each week? How does it (positively or negatively) affect or impact your attitudes through the week?

**READ:** John 8:25-47

Who do you listen to? Jesus told his audience: "He who belongs to God *hears what God says.*" (John 8:47) But, in the next breath, he said "The reason you do *not hear* is that you do not belong to God." Earlier on he had told them: "you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for *my word ... and you do what you have heard* from your father." (John 8:37-38) In John 8:44, he said that their father, the devil, is the source of lies and is a murderer. Even without media and social media, people in Jesus' day were impacted by messages that were circulated by people who wanted to get rid of Jesus and his teaching.

- How do you 'listen' to God/ His word? What do you do to make a place for God's word in your life?

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he told them to "Let the word of Christ dwell (ie: make its home) in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Col 3:16)

- How important is Bible study as a facet of your Life Group?
- How much do you rely on church and your Life Group, to provide you with 'spiritual nourishment'?

Last week, I used a quote by Douglas Moo, that "The good news of Jesus Christ is intended to transform a person's life. Until individual Christians own and live out the theology, the gospel has not accomplished its purpose."<sup>2</sup> In Rom 12:1-2, we learned that our mindset and way of thinking must be transformed, so that we make intentional decisions to live in a way that pleases God. In 2 Tim 3:16-17, we learn that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man (and woman) of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

- Why do you read and study the Bible? (ie what is your primary motivation?) Is it primarily to learn the content of the Bible? To get guidance for day to day issues? To become more 'godly'? Other?

In John 8:31-32, Jesus said that if we remain/ continue/ hold onto his Word, two things result: we will be "true" disciples and we will "know the truth". Jesus said that he speaks the truth that he has received from the Father. (John 8:26-28) In John 14:6, Jesus claimed that "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life ..."

- We live in an era where truth is seen in 'relative' terms, impacted by our culture and perspective. In recent years, new terms have entered our language including "fake news" and "alternative facts". What do you think Jesus meant when he said "I am ... the Truth" and you "will know the truth"?

We have talked about belonging to the family of God and being God's children. The Jews claimed to be children of Abraham. Jesus, himself, was a Jew and we find in Matt 1:1-2 that Jesus was descended from Abraham. Jesus told them that if their claim was true, they "would do the things Abraham did." (Jn 8:39)

<sup>1</sup> Calnek, A. (June 4 2018) "Fakes, Forgeries and the Experts Who Spot Them." <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/fakes-forgeries-and-the-experts-who-spot-them>

<sup>2</sup> Moo, D. J. (2000). *Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p393.

- Stories are powerful. Stories help us relate to and connect with a message. In the Bible, we find many stories of ordinary people (like Abraham) who obeyed and served God. Think of a couple of Bible 'heroes'. What do we learn from their stories, about how to live a life that pleases God?

In John 14:23-24, Jesus taught: "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." Two verses later, Jesus told them that "But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)

- If we make a place for Jesus' teaching in our lives and obey it, we show that we love God. How does God respond to us, as we consciously seek to obey his will?

In John 8:35, Jesus talked about there being two different types of people in a household: the people who belong to the family/ have a place there forever (ie: sons and daughters) and others (such as slaves) who don't have a permanent place and are not going to stick around forever. In the previous breath, Jesus tells us who the 'slaves' are: "everyone who sins is a slave to sin." (John 8:34)

- Is it possible to be a child of God and to keep on sinning? Why/ why not?
- In John 8:36, Jesus said that "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed". In context, Jesus was talking about freedom from slavery to sin. Is it possible to not sin, in the midst of a sinful world?
- Read 1 Pet 2:24 and 1 John 2:28-3:10. What answers does these passages give us about the previous two questions? What do they say about what Jesus has done for us? What do they counsel us to do? What does the 1 John passage teach us about being 'true' children of God?

The message in the New Testament about Christians and sin is a little confusing. On one hand, we read that true children of God should not sin. But at the same time, there are messages about what to do when we sin or another person sins.

- Read through the following verses. What do they teach us about dealing with our own sin and sin in our faith community?
  - 1 John 1:5-10, James 5:15-16, Gal 6:1-4, Matt 18:14-17, 1 Tim 5:20, 2 Thess 3:11-15, James 1:19, James 1:22-25; 1 Cor 5:11-13, Rom 16:17, Acts 20:28-31, Col 3:16.

Being in a Life Group allows us to live life together and grow together in the faith. "Like iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another". (Prov 27:17) We need to help each other grow more like Christ and help each other be authentic in our discipleship, but we need to do that in a loving way.

- Read Eph 4:15 and Col 4:6. How do we balance truth and love, 'salt' and grace?
- What do these verses mean for how we have conversations with each other, when we're dealing with issues of temptation and sin?

Some years ago, a younger Christian woman shared some significant struggles that she was dealing with. I was out of my depth and didn't know how to respond. I remember praying: "God – how do I respond to this?" In that moment, I asked her: "have you taken that to the foot of the Cross?" While she had professed faith and was active in ministry, she admitted that she'd never talked with God about the issue or named it. The first step in dealing with sin is in confessing it: being honest before God and naming it. I talked and prayed with her. Having taken the step of confessing her struggles to God, she then had courage to make some radical decisions in her life, plus to be honest with some close confidantes about her struggles.

**LISTEN, REFLECT, SHARE & PRAY:** As we study and listen to the Word of God, from day to day and week to week, we need to respond to the Word and the promptings of the Spirit. It is a massive privilege to graciously lead each other to the foot of the Cross and simultaneously, to the Throne of Grace, to receive Christ's awesome grace and mercy for us. (Heb 4:16).

- Below is a link to a Youtube clip of Brooke Fraser's song 'Lead Me to the Cross'. Play the song [Hillsong United album: *All of the Above*] or the Youtube clip, spend some time reflecting on the words, then close your time together in prayer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5R3jv3cOFI>

Heb 13:20-21