



JESUS THE
GAME CHANGER

HOW THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS
CHANGED THE WORLD AND WHY IT MATTERS.

DISCUSSION GUIDE



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DISCUSSION GUIDE

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10 Sessions for Churches and
Discussion Groups.

EDITED BY
WENDY WINTON

To be used in conjunction
with *Jesus the Game Changer*
documentary series.

WWW.JESUSTHEGAMECHANGER.COM

JESUS THE GAME CHANGER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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CONTENTS

EPISODE 1 JESUS	7
EPISODE 2 EQUALITY	15
EPISODE 3 FORGIVENESS	23
EPISODE 4 WOMEN & CHILDREN	31
EPISODE 5 DEMOCRACY	41
EPISODE 6 CARE	49
EPISODE 7 LEADERSHIP	59
EPISODE 8 EDUCATION & HEALTH	67
EPISODE 9 WEALTH	77
EPISODE 10 REASON & SCIENCE	85

INTRODUCTION

In many areas of public life, the significant standing Christian faith and the Bible once held is under pressure. Whether it's teaching the Bible in schools, prayer in public forums or the ability to espouse values with a Christian foundation in public life, we see a backlash against these views.

This opposition is often generated from a worldview that pits the Bible against emerging liberal attitudes in our community. The values that we took for granted just 20-30 years ago are now the subject of vigorous debate and radical change.

Very few people in western democracies question the equality of all people, the positive moral value of helping the poor, needy and marginalised, the right for education to be available to everyone in society, that humility is a virtue or that medical and hospital care should be available to all people. These values did not exist at the time of Jesus and if it were not for His life and teaching and the work of the Church across the centuries, this world would be a very different place.

In *Jesus the Game Changer* we will explore the foundational roots of many of the values society holds as essential for a positive community and for people to flourish. We will be exploring how the life and teaching of Jesus changed the world and why it matters.

KARL FAASE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The purpose of this discussion guide is to allow participants who watch *Jesus the Game Changer* to discuss the content and explore the influence of Jesus in the world. The guide will provide the enquiring, the sceptical and believer alike, the opportunity to explore vital questions which emerge from a consideration of the impact that Jesus has had and why it matters today.

Our aim with this guide is to provide an environment for open, reflective and honest questions emerging from the subjects of each DVD episode.

This guide is designed to help small groups navigate the material in *Jesus the Game Changer* in a manner that will help stimulate discussion and bring the issues into real life situations. Participants will be given the opportunity to consider how the key ideas presented in the series might impact their lives.

A group leader or facilitator should read this material prior to the group watching the relevant episode together. This should take around 30 minutes.

Once the group has viewed the episode, work through the discussion guide, using the readings and questions to assist and as a stimulus for conversation.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Here are some suggestions on how to approach the discussion:

Don't worry about necessarily trying to complete all the questions. Decide as a group which ones to focus on and allow the discussion to go where it takes you. These are big topics to discuss and there's no need to rush through them all.

Encourage honesty and a genuine wrestling with the issue at hand. Some of the topics may raise some emotions, fears and enthusiasms and these are best dealt with in a safe and open manner.

Expect and allow for very different responses to the topics covered. We all have different experiences to bring to the discussion. Diverse interpretations will enrich the discussion and are to be welcomed. Considerate and respectful listening will aid the process immeasurably.

Try to make a priority of the questions that elicit a practical response and application to real life as experienced by each participant.

Encourage people to consider the material in Further Reading and Research. Some additional material in the form of video interviews is available from the web (for these links go to the *Jesus the Game Changer* app). Consider having participants watch these together or encourage them to pick them up later. Where an issue is especially important to a group member the books in this section may be especially helpful.

**“THE THING THAT OF COURSE
CHANGES EVERYTHING IS JESUS’
DEATH AND RESURRECTION.
JESUS COULD HAVE COME
AND BEEN A WISE TEACHER,
BUT HE’D HAVE JUST BEEN A
VAGUELY INTERESTING PERSON
AT THAT POINT. THE THING THAT
MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT
JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN.”**

PAULA GOODER

EPISODE 1

JESUS

INTRODUCTION

The ten episodes of this series will look at the depth and breadth of influence Jesus had on western democracies and culture. Jesus was, and still is, the Game Changer.

It is important in this first episode of *Jesus the Game Changer* to establish the historicity of Jesus, and, to a certain extent, the Gospels, as accurate source material for His life and teaching.

WATCH EPISODE 1 'JESUS'

GETTING STARTED

This episode commences with an interview with Steven Skiena, a computer scientist who has researched the significance of different people to determine their relative influence on history. Skiena's research caused him to write in his book *Who's Bigger?* that Jesus of Nazareth is the most influential person in human history.

- 1 Give one or two examples of the influence of Jesus on our culture.

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

READ LUKE 1:1-4

Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke, as well as the book of Acts, in the New Testament. He opens the Gospel by giving his reason for writing the account of Jesus' life.

- 2 How do these verses explain what Luke was setting out to accomplish?

READ JOHN 20:31 AND JOHN 21:24

The Gospel of John was written by one of Jesus' disciples and close friend, John. He was described as 'the disciple Jesus loved' and was the only disciple to die of natural causes; the other disciples were martyred. John also wrote the book in the Bible called Revelation.

- 3 What do these verses tell you about what John was attempting to achieve and the scope of what he was writing?

GAME CHANGERS

THE HISTORICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The authenticity and credibility of the Bible are explored a number of times in this episode. Guests interviewed note that several writers (apart from the followers of Jesus) wrote about Jesus at the time He lived. These included Tacitus, Josephus and Pliny.

- 4 Why do you think this is important?

Several of the scholars looking at the history of the Bible attest to the strength of the historical records concerning Jesus.

- 5 Does it surprise you that there are so many copies of the Gospel stories of Jesus?

6 How does this impact your confidence in the integrity of the accounts?

There is some discussion about perceived differences between the four accounts of the story of Jesus (the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). The differences are not critical to the key elements of Jesus' life, death and resurrection however sceptics suggest this shows the accounts can't be trusted as they are not exactly the same.

Darrell Bock (New Testament Professor, Dallas Theological Seminary) speaks about the use of the 'instant replay' of sporting events as an analogy in the episode. He says:

'Some angles will answer the question that you're looking at in terms of what the call should be, and others won't because they just don't give you the right angle. So you get these differences between the Gospels; and what sceptics will tend to exploit as contradiction actually may be only difference and may only be a different angle on things.'

7 Does Bock's illustration about viewing the action at sporting events from different angles help you understand the differences in the Gospels?

8 After watching this episode and considering the life of Jesus, list what you think Jesus left when His time on earth was finished.

9 If you lived at the time of Jesus and watched these events unfold, would you have thought that what He had done would last?

10 Why do you think that Christian faith is not only still being practiced but is the largest religion around the world?

PEOPLE INFLUENCED TO CHANGE

There are four stories of lives changed in this episode:

Paul on road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9)

Rico Tice – London

Ian Harper – Melbourne

Mary Jo Sharp – Houston

11 What in each of these stories ...

- A was similar?
- B pointed to the different ways people have been influenced by Jesus?
- C struck you as unusual?
- D made you think most?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

How do you respond to Ian Harper's concluding comment '*What do you know; it's actually true.*'

How do you see Jesus as the Game Changer after this episode and study?

FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH

Bock, D. L. (2002). *Studying the historical Jesus: a guide to sources and methods*. Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic.

Sharp, M. J. (2012). *Defending the faith: apologetics in women's ministry*. Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Publications.

Skiena, S and Ward, C.B. (2014). *Who's bigger? Where historical figures really rank*. Cambridge NY: Cambridge University Press.

Tice, R and Cooper, B. (2011). *The Real Jesus*. New Malden, Surrey: The Good Book Company.

**“THE CASE FOR HUMAN
EQUALITY RESTS ON THE
IDEA THAT GOD CREATED ALL
PEOPLE IN HIS IMAGE, MALE
AND FEMALE, THAT ALL HAVE
SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT
OF THE GLORY OF GOD. SO A
BRAHMIN, AN UPPER CASTE
HINDU IS NOT CLOSER TO GOD
BECAUSE OF HIS BIRTH. HE IS
AS FAR AWAY FROM GOD AS
AN UNTOUCHABLE PERSON.”**

VISHAL MANGALWADI

EPISODE 2

EQUALITY

INTRODUCTION

Jesus taught that each individual had inherent value – they were loved by God and worthy of love and consideration from other people. The teaching of Jesus, Paul the Apostle and Augustine (354-430 AD) soon after, shifted the focus from people being viewed only as members of families, castes, cities or communities, to being individuals of worth. This became the central plank of western thought and the foundation on which modern democracies were built. The shift to the focus on the individual and hence the foundation of modern western thought is directly attributable to the teachings of Jesus.

WATCH EPISODE 2 'EQUALITY'

GETTING STARTED

Karl Faase quotes from the United States Declaration of Independence which states:

'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.'

- 1 Why was it necessary to commence this document with these words?
-

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

READ MATTHEW 18:10-14

In the episode we talk of this parable as not making a lot of economic sense. The shepherd risks the 99 for one lost or missing sheep.

- 2 What do you think Jesus is trying to demonstrate about God with this picture?
-

READ JOHN 10:1-13

Here we see two different ways shepherds dealt with the sheep under their care. The first scene (v1-6) shows the common pen holding sheep in the village overnight. A number of different shepherds would come in from the hills and place their sheep in this common pen for safe keeping until they were ready to take their flock back out into the countryside. When they were ready they would go to the gate of the pen (v3) and collect their sheep. They entered through the gate not over the fence (thieves entered via other means). They knew their sheep and called them out. The sheep knew and trusted the shepherd and followed.

The second scene (v7-13) shows the shepherd out in the countryside for a number of days with his sheep, away from the village and common pen. In this situation the shepherd built a small holding pen from branches and bushes. There was no door to this pen but the shepherd would lie down across the gap; he was the door and the protector of the sheep in the pen overnight.

- 3 How is the first picture of the shepherd calling the sheep out of the pen a reflection of God's role?

- 4 In the second picture the shepherd is lying across the gap of the temporary pen. What does this tell us about God?

- 5 In both scenarios Jesus compares the real shepherd to the thief or the hired hand. What is this seeking to tell you about God?

GAME CHANGERS

READ GALATIANS 3:28

In this episode James Orr (Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Oxford) comments that the Greek philosopher Aristotle considered slaves to be non-persons, neither male nor female. Aristotle saw slaves as born into that role and the property of their owners. He viewed them as 'living tools'. In his book Politics he wrote:

'... indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life.'

- 6 In the context of the philosophy that underpinned the Greco-Roman world, how do you think Paul's words in Galatians 3:28 would have affected people's thinking?
-

READ COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1

- 7 In the light of the culture of the time, how is this passage a change in the prevailing world view?
-

India has for centuries been deeply influenced by Hindu philosophy. Episode guest Vishal Mangalwadi (Philosopher and Social Reformer, India) seeks to help those from other nations understand this philosophy. Hinduism teaches that your place in this life is determined by your behaviour in a previous life. This concept is underpinned by two key ideas. Firstly reincarnation, where every soul returns again and again. Secondly, your behaviour in life impacts your place in the next life; this is referred to as karma. So the upper cast Brahmin feels justified in having privilege as a reward reflecting actions in a past life. This is a culture where inequality is institutionalised via religious philosophy.

- 8 Consider what life would be like in a nation where inequality of life is institutionalised.
-

Vishal Mangalwadi makes the point that belief in evolution does not logically lead to belief in the equality of all people but rather points in the opposite direction.

- 9 Consider the concept of human equality from the perspective of evolution and a theory of survival of the fittest.
-

William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect brought about the end of slavery in English society. Wilberforce and those who supported him were very unpopular at that time. The English economy relied in large part on this trade. Any attempt to agitate for societal change in England brought fear and suspicion that this could encourage revolution, like that occurring across the channel in France where people rose up violently against the nobility.

10 How has this episode clarified Wilberforce's motivation?

11 What kept him going in the face of opposition?

12 There have been times and places where those who refer to themselves as Christians have supported the slave trade. What does this episode suggest regarding their values?

There is a lot of discussion in our community about equality and Christians have been accused of supporting inequality through the stand they make on moral issues.

13 If all people are equal does that make all ideas equal?

14 How do we define the difference between the equality of people and the equality of ideas?

15 In a world where many different versions of the truth, morality and equality are promoted, how can we decide what values to follow?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Jesus taught that every single human being is made in the image of God and all human beings are equal.

How does this manifest itself in your thoughts and actions?

FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH

Mangalwadi, V. (2011). *The book that made your world: how the Bible created the soul of Western civilization*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson. (see Chapter 3)

Metaxas, E. (2007). *Amazing grace: William Wilberforce and the heroic campaign to end slavery*. Oxford: Monarch.

Ortberg, J. (2014). *Who is this man? The unpredictable impact of the inescapable Jesus*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan. (see Chapters 2 and 3)

Siedentop, L. (2015). *Inventing the individual; the origins of western liberalism*. London: Penguin Books.

Swallow, K. (2014). *Fierce convictions: the extraordinary life of Hannah More – poet, reformer, abolitionist*. Nashville: Nelson Books.

**“HE BROUGHT THE PRACTICE
OF AND THE MESSAGE OF
THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE
OF GOD. HE WAS GOD’S
FACE TURNED TOWARDS
US IN RADICAL EMBRACE.
I THINK THAT CHANGES JUST
ABOUT EVERYTHING!”**

MIROSLAV VOLF

EPISODE 3

FORGIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us' is the closest thing to a command in the Lord's Prayer, the most famous prayer in history. Jesus taught extensively about forgiveness and His words have echoed down the centuries to be some of the most significant ever spoken.

WATCH EPISODE 3 'FORGIVENESS'

GETTING STARTED

- 1 When have you found that you were able to forgive and when has it been too difficult?

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

READ MATTHEW 6:12-15

These verses are from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1 to 7:28). While Jesus is preaching to a large group of people on a mountainside He teaches us how to pray.

Jesus is not setting a specific form of words for all people to recite exactly but He provides a template of the sorts of things we should be praying about. It is significant that the Lord's Prayer includes forgiveness (v12); immediately after the prayer Jesus continues the theme.

- 2 What strikes you as significant about what Jesus is teaching here?

- 3 This seems to be a conditional caveat on our ability to receive forgiveness. Why do you think Jesus makes such a significant issue out of forgiveness?

READ MATTHEW 18:21-35

In this passage Peter has asked Jesus how many times he (Peter) should forgive someone who has wronged him. Many of us have heard Jesus' response that we should forgive others 'not seven times but seventy times seven.' (v21-22) Some translations say 'seventy-seven times'.

At that time Jewish rabbis taught that you should forgive others three times, but not on the fourth occasion. By offering to forgive seven times, Peter has offered to double that number plus one; it seems like a very generous offer! Jesus' response though redefines forgiveness. 'No', he says, 'it's seventy-seven times' – not a number but rather an attitude; always be ready to forgive.

4 How do you respond to this story?

5 Why do most of us feel the servant's actions are unfair?

6 How could the content of this story relate to people today?

7 Do you think Jesus' words here are possible to achieve?

- 8 What stops people forgiving 'seventy-seven times'?
- 9 What difference does it make if we forgive someone when they are feeling only remorse (sad for being caught out) rather than real repentance (a complete change of heart)?

GAME CHANGERS

In this episode Paula Gooder (writer and lecturer, Birmingham) defines forgiveness in these words:

'the thing I love about the Greek word ... the word for forgiveness simply means 'let go' ... the people who do the forgiveness 'let go' ... like a balloon – you let it go and off it goes. Then also the people who need forgiveness have to let it go as well.'

- 10 How have you experienced this sense of letting go?
- 11 Why is it that we struggle with letting go?
- 12 Who is freed when we do let go?

Hashim Garrett (Speaker, New York) quotes Martin Luther King Jr who says about forgiveness:

'Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a constant attitude.'

Both Hashim Garrett and Miroslav Volf (Professor of Theology, Yale) comment on the ongoing nature of forgiveness and the struggle to continue to forgive and not 'take it back'.

13 Why do we want to take back forgiveness?

14 What would be the outcome if we did?

15 What would change if we were more ready to continually forgive?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

The basis for much of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, such as Matthew 6:12-15, is that we are challenged to forgive in the way that we have been forgiven. The underlying assumption is that forgiveness has been offered and accepted by people.

Jesus was clear, as were His followers, that forgiveness from God is available to all who ask. Jesus' close friend John put it in these words:

'... if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and forgives us our sins' (1 John 1:9)

At the end of the episode Rico Tice (Minister, All Souls, London) takes some time to explain what forgiveness is and how it is received from God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If you have come to the place where you want to ask for and receive forgiveness from God, pray this prayer that Rico outlined in the episode:

'Lord Jesus, thank you for dying for me on the cross. I'm so sorry for my wrong doing. Please come into my heart by your Holy Spirit and be my Lord and Master.'

FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH

Ortberg, J. (2014). *Who is this man? The unpredictable impact of the inescapable Jesus*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan. (see chapter 7)

Arnold, J.C. (2010). *Why forgive?* Walden NY: Plough Publishing.

Volf, M. (2005). *Free of charge: giving and forgiving in a culture stripped of grace*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan.

“THAT’S WHY HE’S THE GAME CHANGER, BECAUSE HE TOOK THIS UNNAMED, UNWANTED, ABUSED, ADOPTED CHICK THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN A STATISTIC, AND HE WAS THE GAME CHANGER. HE JUST TURNED MY LIFE AROUND RADICALLY. THEN, NOT ONLY THAT, BUT HE GAVE ME THE SENSE THAT MY LIFE COULD BE A GAME CHANGER FOR SOMEBODY ELSE’S LIFE.”

CHRISTINE CAINE

EPISODE 4

WOMEN & CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Though Christianity is sometimes stereotyped in the popular imagination as a patriarchal religion, this is an inaccurate reflection of both Jesus' teaching and the history of the Church. For His time, Jesus was radically inclusive of both men and women. On the whole, the Church has been a place where women have experienced greater freedom than in society. In the same way Jesus went out of his way to focus on children, giving them worth.

WATCH EPISODE 4 'WOMEN & CHILDREN'

GETTING STARTED

- 1 In what ways are women or children in contemporary society not experiencing freedom?
-

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

READ LUKE 8:1-3

Luke unfolds the story of Jesus' ministry through this Gospel narrative. He includes all sorts of interesting pieces of information such as here where he mentions three women who not only followed Jesus but also supported His ministry.

First mentioned is Mary Magdalene who many have assumed is a prostitute, despite there being no evidence from Luke (or any other writers) that this was the case. We do know that several demons were cast out of her and she was indebted to Jesus. We also hear of Joanna's link to Herod's household, a position of privilege and potential influence. Finally, Susanna is mentioned; she contributes from her own resources to support Jesus.

It's instructive to note that some of these women are also mentioned at Jesus' crucifixion when all the male disciples had run away (Mark 15:40-41). They are also the first ones to find the tomb empty and announce that Jesus had risen (Luke 24:10).

2 What do these stories tell us about the significance of women in the ministry of Jesus?

3 Why do you think there was such a high level of commitment by women to Jesus' ministry?

READ JOHN 20:10-18

Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb with other women to anoint the body of Jesus with spices; a custom of treating the dead with honour and respect. When they get there Jesus' body had disappeared. John recounts that the others ran to tell the rest of Jesus' followers what they had discovered but Mary remains in the garden.

4 What do you make of this interaction between Mary and Jesus?

5 Why is it important?

6 Does it add to, or detract from, your assessment of the believability of the story?

READ LUKE 10:38-42

As a younger person this story always bothered me. Here was Martha working away to make a meal and Mary is just sitting around. When Martha points out what she sees as an obvious injustice, Jesus sides with the 'lazy' sister. As a kid I always wondered how that was fair.

Key to this story is that Mary wasn't just sitting around! Martha had taken the traditional role for women of preparing food. Mary on the other hand was sitting at Jesus' feet, the place of learning. When Martha complains, Jesus makes the point that Mary is learning, growing in knowledge and expanding her mind. These are not only important but 'it will not be taken away from her'. Not taken by her industrious and annoyed sister, nor by a culture that believed she could not, or should not, learn.

7 If you have heard this story before what has been your reaction?

8 Consider what it tells us about Jesus' attitude to women.

READ MATTHEW 18:1-6

In a society where parents must have loved children they were also seen as disposable, especially if the 'wrong' gender. It is difficult for us to imagine that unwanted children were exposed to the elements and left to die. Read this statement from John Ortberg (Pastor and author, San Francisco):

'Seneca, a Roman writer of the first century, said 'we drown the infirm at birth.' That wasn't considered something to be embarrassing, or something that they would try to hide, it's just they viewed life in that way.'

The attitude of the Greco-Roman world to pride, position and power is discussed in another episode but it is clear from this passage that talking about how wonderful you were was fairly usual behaviour. This seems to be the topic of the disciple's conversation (v1). In response Jesus uses a child to make His point about 'who is greatest'.

9 Why was it so significant that Jesus used a child as an example here?

10 How has Jesus' treatment of a child in this story helped reframe attitudes to childhood?

GAME CHANGERS

Read and discuss the following two quotes from Jo Vitale (Apologist, Oxford) regarding how women were seen in Jesus' and Paul's time in history.

'Plato basically argued that women are in every sense inferior to men. Whether that's morally, intellectually, spiritually and physically, just in every sense they're not on the same level.'

'Jewish men would regularly pray 'thank you God that I'm not a Gentile, a slave or a woman.'

READ EPHESIANS 5:25-32

Many see the Christian Church's attitude to women as misogynistic. Passages like the one just read, especially v22-24, seem to suggest men should control women.

In this series there has been much discussion about very young women (13-16 years) marrying much older men and being treated as possessions.

- 11 Discuss whether the content of these verses (Ephesians 5:25-32) would have been read by the Early Church as 'misogynistic', 'normal and usual' or 'radical and revolutionary'?
-

In response to the discussion around women in modern society, and how the Church treats women, Jo Vitale makes this statement:

'I've found a freedom that I don't see anywhere else in our culture. A freedom from being objectified, from being seen as just a sexual object, a freedom to become who God has called me to be in every aspect of life, and it's not about meeting cultural expectations and what society says I have to do. Actually, it's about who does God call me to be.'

12 What is your response to this statement?

13 How would following Jesus release women from pressure and even exploitation within our culture?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

It's clear from this episode that there is still plenty to be done to protect and value women and children, and follow Jesus' teaching to abolish injustice within our society.

Christine Caine (Activist and Founder, A21) finishes this episode by saying:

'Jesus came and rescued me and my life can be a game changer for someone else's life. It doesn't mean it has to be spectacular, it doesn't mean it has to be sensational. I truly believe if you value your life, your life can be a game changer for somebody else's, absolutely.'

How could your words or actions make a difference for someone else?

FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH

Bakke, O.M. (2005). *When children became people: the birth of childhood in early Christianity*. Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press.

Mangalwadi, V. (2011). *The book that made your world: how the Bible created the soul of western civilization*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
(see Chapter 15)

Metaxas, E. (2015). *Seven women; and the secret of their greatness*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ortberg, J. (2014). *Who is this man? The unpredictable impact of the inescapable Jesus*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan. (see Chapter 4)

Stark, R. (1996). *The rise of Christianity: a sociologist reconsiders history*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press. (see Chapter 5)

Stark, R. (2011). *The triumph of Christianity: how the Jesus movement became the world's largest religion*. New York NY: Harper Collins.
(see Chapter 7)

“IN THE WEST IN PARTICULAR, WE HAVE GOTTEN SO USED TO THE IDEA OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, WE TAKE IT FOR GRANTED. WE HAVE NO IDEA THAT IF IT’S A CUT FLOWER, IT WILL CONTINUE TO LOOK BEAUTIFUL FOR A SEASON, BUT ULTIMATELY IT’S LOST THE CONNECTION TO THE SOURCE OF LIFE.”

ERIC METAXAS

EPISODE 5

DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

Jesus is not often associated with having anything to say about democracy. He did not live in a democracy, nor did He explicitly call for its creation – in fact, He explicitly denied that He was interested in setting up a secular political system. Jesus did, however, teach about freedom and many of His teachings had political implications that have been developed by Christians over the last 2000 years.

WATCH EPISODE 5 'DEMOCRACY'

GETTING STARTED

1 What do you think is needed for a fair, just and robust democracy?

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Paul writes to a church in Philippi wanting to help them understand what a life following Jesus looks like. He outlines values that are obviously at odds with the Greco-Roman world and still out of step with our current culture. Key to these verses is how we are to think about ourselves in relation to others.

Note that v6-11 are not believed to be Paul's own words, but rather Paul quoting some type of hymn or poem passed between believers. In a pre-literate culture poems like this were a crucial way of sharing knowledge.

2 What do you see as the key idea in v1-4?

3 Why is that thought important?

4 How and why were people to live out that ethic?

5 How were the life and actions of Jesus important in this teaching?

Dale Kuehne (Professor of Politics, New Hampshire) discusses American democracy and speaks of French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville's assessment (around 1830) of the democratic system:

Tocqueville looked at America and said 'What is going to keep us from pursuing our own individual self-interests?' He believed that people, no question, were self-interested, but for democracy to work, we had to get outside of ourselves, we had to get to know our neighbours, and we had to work together with our neighbours to make a good community. And Tocqueville said that Christianity was the faith that got us out of ourselves.'

6 How do this quote and the thoughts of Philippians 2:2-4 link together?

In Episode 2 we discussed Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:28. This verse is built on the teaching of Jesus who treated everyone equally; women (Luke 8:1-3), the sick (Matthew 9:20-22), children (Matthew 18:1-3), the disabled (Matthew 9:27-34), poor outcasts (Luke 5:12-13) wealthy outcasts (Luke 19:1-10) and those who everyone else believed were morally corrupt and socially isolated (John 4:4-26, John 8:3-11, Luke 7:36-48).

Jesus' life and teaching valued all people as equal, all are worthwhile, all have equal rights. This concept is the foundational idea of democracy.

GAME CHANGERS

In this episode Jonathan Hill (Theologian, University of Exeter) makes the point that what many believe was 'democracy' in the Greek culture was not free, open and inclusive democracy as we know it:

'When you use the word democracy, that's a Greek word, right? It just means 'rule of the demos' – the people. It was what they had in ancient Athens in the time of Plato and Socrates and Aristotle. But what they had wasn't what we would recognise as a democracy ... the way the ancient Athenian democracy worked was, everyone just came to the marketplace in the centre of town and voted. It was basically government by referendum. Everything that happened, everyone, all the voters just turned up and stuck their hands up. And they could do that because ... well, partly because it was just one city, but partly because not many people actually had the vote. It was about 1/6 of people. You had to be male, women didn't have the vote, foreigners didn't, slaves didn't. It was pretty aristocratic. Rule of the 'aristos', the best, is what that literally means, the rule of nobility.'

John Anderson (Deputy Prime Minister of Australia 20.7.99 to 6.7.05) makes the point that other nations recognise that the foundation of democracy in our culture was initiated from Christian belief:

'The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (as Jonathan Sacks from the House of Lords, Chief Rabbi of England, has pointed out) – they established that in fact, Christianity really lay at the heart of the rise of western civilisation.'

- 7 How does thinking about these foundations of democracy influence your views about church and state?

- 8 Is it possible to have democracy without a Christian foundation or world view?

READ COLOSSIANS 1:24

This is a complex and challenging statement from Paul. It could sound like the death of Jesus was not enough to cover the failures of humanity and so Paul is making up the difference with his own actions. It is better to think of this passage as Paul saying that as Christ carried the sin of the world in His body there may be times when we are called on to do the same. As the New Living translation puts it:

'I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for His body, the church.'

It seems that Dietrich Bonhoeffer had this same attitude. In this episode, Tom Gregg (Professor of Divinity, University of Aberdeen) is trying to explain how a Christian leader could be involved in an assassination attempt:

'He (Bonhoeffer) writes probably to my mind his most important book, The Ethics, during this time and during his time in prison. What we find in it is accounts of forgiveness, accounts of dealing with sin and accounts of something that he calls vicarious action. He calls the Church to vicariously take upon itself the guilt of the world; actually to share in the work that Christ does might mean that, like Christ, we have to pour upon ourselves guilt, that we might have to take the sin of the world upon ourselves.'

9 What does 'vicarious action' mean for you?

10 Can you see a time, or place, in the world when that might be called for, or occurring right now?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Dale Kuehne opens this episode with the following statement:

'Alexis de Tocqueville said that for a democracy to work, it had to have enough people do the right thing when nobody was watching.'

'Not everybody who's virtuous has faith, but on balance, you have to have a reason to be virtuous.' (Eric Metaxas, biographer and radio host, New York). What is your reason?

How does having a biblical foundation and belief enable you to flourish?

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“THE BELIEF THAT THERE IS A GOD LIKE THE ONE THAT JESUS TAUGHT OF, WHO SAYS THAT THE MOST PAIN-FILLED, MOST DISABLED, MOST HURTING HUMAN BEING CARRIES THE IMAGE OF GOD, AND THAT IT’S AN ENNOBLING THING TO SACRIFICE FOR THEM. WELL, THERE’S DYNAMITE IN THAT.”

JOHN ORTBERG

EPISODE 6

CARE

INTRODUCTION

Though Jesus interacted with a range of people, He ministered (more than anyone else) among the poor and the marginalised in society. Jesus did not merely interact – He helped them and taught His followers to do likewise. Christians' willingness to obey Jesus has profoundly shaped our world. The origins of hospitals, schools, countless charities and much international aid demonstrates the significant change made by Jesus.

WATCH EPISODE 6 'CARE'

GETTING STARTED

In western democracies the majority of people believe we should care for others and be concerned for those who have little or nothing. When our community is not able to care for the desperate, such as during the asylum crisis, there is an outpouring of grief and guilt.

- 1 Where did this emphasis on the value of caring for the poor and those in need originate?
-

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

READ LUKE 4:16-30

Early in Jesus' ministry He returns home to Galilee. He is at the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath (Saturday) participating in the weekly Jewish worship. Jesus is given the opportunity to read the Scripture which that day was from the prophet Isaiah. We're told that Jesus opened the scroll to a specific passage and read from Isaiah 61:1-2.

This passage looked forward to the Messiah coming (a messianic reading). There are a couple of significant messages about the role and work of the Messiah. The 'Spirit of the Lord' would be upon Him and He would have a bias towards the poor, the prisoner, the blind and the oppressed. These verses can be interpreted as equally applicable to both spiritual and physical poverty, blindness and oppression.

The key, and the controversial part of this reading, is what Jesus says as He sits down. 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' (v21). Jesus is claiming the mantle of the Messiah. This caused an uproar (v28-29). It's never wise to have messianic pretensions in your hometown! But what does this passage say about the role of the Messiah?

- 2 When you consider God coming to earth, why do you think He would make this disadvantaged group of people (v18-19) His priority?

- 3 How is this an unusual focus?

- 4 If we acknowledge that what we have is from God, it seems reasonable to believe that if we are prosperous, we are blessed. What do these verses tell us about the claim that we can know if God is with us by our possessions?

- 5 If God has a predisposition towards the poor what does that suggest about our attitudes?

READ LUKE 14:12-14

There are many differences between the Greco-Roman culture and our current time. Something that never changes however is human nature. In Jesus' time people hosting social functions did what is often done today – they invited those with the most wealth, power and prestige in anticipation of some positive kickback or reward. In today's society these 'elite' people may be referred to as the 'A-listers'; those running important events want the 'A-listers' to attend to give kudos and profile to the occasion.

Jesus challenged the party hosts and the event organisers to have a different attitude. Invite the neediest; invite the poor, crippled, blind and lame. The people on nobody's list and the people who can't invite you back.

6 When do you find your invitation list infected by the 'prominence disease'?

7 Why is this challenge of Jesus so hard to achieve?

8 Can you think of other ways (than luncheons or parties) to put these words into practice?

GAME CHANGERS

Jesus' teaching and attitude in the area of care became the template for the actions of the community life of Christians in the Early Church. Keep in mind at that time there were no other options; no government help and no other community services. If your family abandoned you, life was precarious. Begging was the only other option.

Christian care for the most needy was noticed and their repute spread into the wider community. Rodney Stark (Sociologist of Religion, Waco) comments on these actions and the response of the Emperor Julian the Apostate:

'There was a Roman emperor somewhat later, Julian the Apostate, who wrote to the pagan temples and said, 'You've got to start looking after the sick people and the poor, because these Christians are doing that, and they're doing it, ust of course to outdo us and make us look bad' ... nothing in the idea that they were doing it out of virtue; but of course, his directions to the temples went nowhere because there was no basis for it. There was nothing in the pagan traditions about giving money to the poor.'

9 What ethical values do you have which motivate you to care for those in need?

10 Contrast the care in communities or nations which don't hold the values Jesus taught, with those that seek to actively live out these values.

Rico Tice comments on the actions of the Early Church. He speaks about these Christians showing agape love (love for the unlovely) and the death of Jesus on the Cross:

They give them shelter. They bury not only their own dead, but other people's dead. They care for them. People were staggered, and of course, the word behind this is this word 'agape' which is 'love for the unlovely'. The Roman world hadn't heard of it. It was coined with the Christian Church emerging. People say, 'How do you explain this love for the unlovely?' Well, only because Jesus at the Cross dies for the unlovely; His followers serve the unlovely.'

11 What is it about agape love that is challenging?

12 How does love for the unlovely challenge our society's view of love?

13 Very few people we know in western countries become a martyr, someone who loses their life for their beliefs. Tice suggests that Jesus' death is an example for all people and influences both attitudes and behaviour. If you decide to follow Jesus, who went to a cross for others, what does that say about how you ought to live?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

In this episode, Rodney Stark says:

'It was the essence of the Christian lifestyle that people cared for one another and looked after one another and that there's a much greater sense of an intimate community, the community of believers.'

What's your experience of 'community' and 'care'?

Jossy Chacko (Founder and President, Empart) sees the people in his 'community' as:

'all great game changers, but in different ways. Some are caring for the kids and some are doing the cleaning ... praying for others, giving our resources, loving our neighbour, helping those people that you see in your daily life. To me, it's more than the actions. It's a mindset. It's really seeing ourselves differently and seeing our purpose on this earth differently. It doesn't matter who you are, young to the old. If you are breathing, you can be a game changer!'

What motivates your desire for community?

Consider how you could more actively contribute to building 'community'.

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**“THE TURNING POINT IN HISTORY,
IN TERMS OF THIS MOTIF OF
THE HUMBLE LEADER, IS THE
CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS, WHERE
THE CHRISTIANS SPOTTED THAT
TO BE TRULY GREAT MEANS
TO LOWER YOURSELF FOR THE
SAKE OF ANOTHER.”**

JOHN DICKSON

EPISODE 7

LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Despite being the most influential figure in human history, Jesus did not follow the conventional patterns of leadership of His time. He gathered only a small group of followers in His lifetime and died a humiliating death at the hands of the Roman authorities. His call for His followers to serve one another as servant leaders is one of the most powerful and enduring ideas from all of His example and teaching.

WATCH EPISODE 7 'LEADERSHIP'.

GETTING STARTED

- 1 Try to define 'greatness' – what are the characteristics of a great person?
-

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

READ JOHN 13:1-17

This story of Jesus is one that has greatly influenced the Church and the world. It emphasises the importance of how a great person acts; not what they say. There are many people talking about service but there are sadly precious few who actually give of themselves.

Foot washing in Jesus' day was not a caring ritual, rather it was a necessary function in a community marked by hot conditions and wearing sandals on dusty roads. As explained in the episode, a meal shared with others reclined at a table would be exceedingly disagreeable if participants did not have their feet washed. This unpleasant task was usually left to the lowliest servant. No one wanted to wash feet.

Jesus, who was under no illusions about His position in the world (see v1), takes up the task of washing His followers' feet. Jesus makes it clear that this was not just a one-off action in unusual circumstances; this was an attitude that ought to permeate all of life.

- 1 We don't have to wash people's feet anymore but there is still the chance to serve. What does serving others look like to you?

- 2 Give some examples of what is done by those you know who model great service.

READ MATTHEW 20:25-28

John Ortberg comments on these verses:

'When Jesus would say things like 'the Gentiles lord it over others' He was not being pejorative, He was being descriptive. If followers of the Greco-Roman culture were to hear those words they would say, 'Yeah, that's exactly what we do.' It's a little bit like in our day. Somebody scores a touchdown, somebody says, 'Of course, I'm great'. So this notion of saying, 'No, actually, greatness is servanthood. Greatness is to be a slave.' Nobody, in the ancient Greco-Roman world, nobody ... was talking about greatness in terms of ... humbling themselves.'

In the episode Paula Gooder comments that in the time of Jesus humility was considered a vice. John Dickson (Historian and Author, Sydney) makes the point that it's not until the middle of the first century AD that humility is written about as a virtue.

- 3 What would a world be like where humility was a vice and pride a virtue?

GAME CHANGERS

Jim Collins is an author whose research uncovered that the most successful companies are led by leaders with two traits; fierce resolve and humility. Note that this idea did not come from Collins reflecting on what would be good, but rather from looking at research about what actually works – what is effective leadership?

Reflect on how these findings compare with Jesus' life and teaching found in Luke 22:26-27.

4 Why do you think humility works in leadership?

5 In many places it seems like successful people are not humble, almost in contradiction to Collins' research. Why do people not act with humility in leadership roles?

6 When have you struggled to act with humility?

How can you pick humility? One way is whether we are focused on talking about ourselves or others. John Dickson makes the point that the shift to humility changed the focus of conversation:

'In antiquity, of course the great would talk about themselves. In fact, you were obliged to talk about how great they were as well, because that's what the natural order demanded. We've just come to despise the honour-seekers and prize humility in a way that would have been bizarre to a Greek and Roman, but is just the air we breathe today.'

- 7 How do you feel when people talk about themselves?

- 8 What is it in our culture that encourages this attitude?

- 9 How would our community be different if we could learn the ethic of putting others first? (Matthew 20:27)

While we recognise that humility is a virtue, there is much in our culture that works against people acting in ways that puts others first, as Jesus taught. John Anderson reflected on how we view this attitude:

*'It's interesting, really, that we live in a culture where, from a very early age on, our children are encouraged to believe they can have it all, because it's about them. We see it in the advertising industry: buy this product, you deserve it.'
'Look after the most important person in the world, you.
The amazing thing about that is when voters see politicians behaving like that, in other words, living out the very value system that we tend to promote to our children as being the right one, they're repulsed by it.'*

10 How do you see people being influenced by the 'me first' world view?

11 How are you influenced by this attitude?

12 Assuming that most of us would agree with John that we are repulsed by self-centric attitudes in our political leaders, why do you think this is the case?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

In this episode Paula Gooder comments:

'... when you have any kind of grouping together, if people connect to each other in humility; then, actually, it completely changes the atmosphere, the feeling, the way in which they relate to each other.'

John Dickson suggests:

'One way to think about it is to hold whatever power you've got, whether that's beauty or intelligence or money or physical prowess; to hold it for the good of others.'

In the areas of your life where you 'lead' (work, family, ministry, volunteer role) how are you serving others?

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“THE BENEDICTINES IN WHAT WE CALL THE DARK AGES, AFTER THE FALL OF ROME, THE BENEDICTINES KEPT THE LIBRARIES ALIVE. THEY KEPT LEARNING ALIVE, THEY KEPT THE BOOKS OF PLATO AND ARISTOTLE AND THE OTHER GREATS AND BROUGHT THEM FORWARD AND THEN LATER IN THE MIDDLE AGES, THEY WERE THE ONES THAT STARTED THE FIRST UNIVERSITIES OUTSIDE THE MONASTERIES.”

DALE KUEHNE

EPISODE 8

EDUCATION & HEALTH

INTRODUCTION

Social institutions such as education and health care had their genesis in the Christian Church. Christian leaders, predominantly monks and nuns were committed to the care and education of not just the wealthy or elite, but everyone. This episode explores the development of two of these key institutions – hospitals and universities – and their link with Christian beginnings.

WATCH EPISODE 8 'EDUCATION & HEALTH'

GETTING STARTED

- 1 In a time in history where education is more freely available than ever before, what are some of the advantages you have seen in your own community as a result?

- 2 What are the flow on effects of an education system? Think about both locally and in other communities.

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

READ MATTHEW 28:18-20

Jesus' final command to His followers was to 'make disciples of all nations'. A part of that process was 'teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'. These words were spoken 2000 years ago and have had enormous influence on the world we live in, not just those within the Church but the world at large. This commission became the foundation on which education was built in societies around the world.

In the episode Vishal Mangalwadi states:

'That's what Jesus is saying. In order to bless all the nations, you must teach them all that I have taught you.'

3 Would this command have been fulfilled without a commitment to universal learning?

4 Is this the basis of most educational systems today? Does this impact the value of education?

READ JOHN 8:31-32

Jesus is talking with those who actually disagreed with Him; they thought they were already free. When Jesus suggests they are not, this discussion does not end well!

There is insight in these words about the pursuit of knowledge and the seeking of truth.

5 Why is truth thought of very differently by various groups?

6 On what do you build your understanding of the concept of truth?

7 How would seeking truth in all areas of life through education help to build a life of faith?

8 Do you think having faith and pursuing truth are different?

In commenting on the growth of the early universities, created by the monastic movements, James Orr states:

'Because of the original monastic DNA of these institutions ... the idea was that learning and scholarship was a spiritual exercise, a spiritual practice.'

READ MARK 12:30

Jesus taught that devotion to God involved more than a spiritual attitude or engagement of the soul – it involved your mind and your commitment (strength).

9 How has Christian faith often neglected this teaching of Jesus?

10 In what ways would this teaching have been an encouragement to monks to gather in groups to study?

READ MATTHEW 25:34-40

These verses are taken from a longer section of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Matthew (25:31-46). Here Jesus gives a picture of a time when people are evaluated by the King (God) based on how they lived their lives. The two groups in this scenario are divided between sheep (who are evaluated well) and the goats (with not such a good outcome).

The actions of those deemed to be 'sheep' was to be commended. They were honoured because they had served the king by providing for him when he was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, needing clothes and imprisoned.

Interestingly, these people can't remember ever seeing the king in distress. The significant reply is 'whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' (v 40).

11 How does the content of these verses impact your thinking?

READ JAMES 2:14-26

It's important not to isolate the words of Jesus in Matthew (above) from passages about God's grace and being made right with God by grace alone.

12 How do you balance the two concepts found in the passages in James and Matthew 25?

GAME CHANGERS

When discussing the history of universities, Dale Kuehne comments on the motivation to educate and start educational institutions that helped people learn. Dale explains ...

'It was an expression of their faith. We often think of Christians or those who are religious as being rather close-minded, but they were of the belief, pretty strongly, that all truth is God's truth, that we need to study the whole of creation. And keeping learning alive, even the ideas of the 'pagans', was something that was really important to them.'

13 Have you perceived Christians in general to be committed to learning and education?

14 Why would some people of faith fear education?

The majority of early institutions which catered for the needs of the poor (and which we would now describe as hospitals) were started by Christians and the Church.

In the 19th century Mary Aikenhead and the Sisters of Charity were motivated to serve those in need (the poor) who they saw as 'God's nobility'. This was not just about being nice, good, or ethical; it was an opportunity to serve God.

Sister Clare Nolan (Congregational Leader, Sisters of Charity, Australia) describes the purpose of the first St Vincent's Hospital:

'It was to serve the poor and not to be discriminating of race, colour, creed, religion.'

Toby Hall (CEO, St Vincent's Health Australia) reflects on the history and size of the hospital today:

'It's crazy to look at five sisters who came 175 years ago, off a boat, that they've set up ... the second-biggest health organisation in the country. That doesn't happen by chance.'

15 What's your response to this factual statement about St Vincent's?

16 How has health care become a usual and expected part of western countries?

17 The genesis of hospital care for the neediest in many countries had its start in Christian organisations. How should this influence how we view the place of the Church in modern cultures?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

How would deepening your knowledge of the world and human history help your spiritual life?

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“THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN REPLACE THE LOVE OF MONEY IS WITH A BETTER LOVE, WITH THE LOVE OF GOD. JESUS IS THE GAME CHANGER BECAUSE HE FUELS THE CHANGE THAT A PERSON HAS TO GO THROUGH BETWEEN LOVING MONEY AND LOVING GOD INSTEAD. THAT CHOICE OF LAYING DOWN THE SERVICE OF MONEY, THE LOVE OF MONEY, TO ACTUALLY VALUE GOD, COMES BECAUSE JESUS ENTERS YOUR HEART.”

JOHN RINEHART

EPISODE 9

WEALTH

INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly, Jesus spoke more about money than nearly any other topic. Jesus challenged the prevailing wisdom of His day and taught that all money was God's, to be used for Him instead of for personal advancement. Jesus particularly challenged the religious hypocrisy of appearing to do good works while actually amassing wealth. Wealth has been a controversial issue throughout Church history, but there are many examples of generous and wise stewards and today, Christian organisations are heavily represented in the charities sector.

WATCH EPISODE 9 'WEALTH'

GETTING STARTED

When we speak about someone with wealth we often use the synonym 'rich'. Yet in other circumstances we use the phrase 'a rich life'.

- 1 How would you describe a 'rich' life?
-

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

The Bible has much to say about money and it's clear that Jesus' influence on peoples' lives changed the way they viewed money. There are two stories we want to look at that reflect this truth. The first is about the tax collector Zacchaeus. Tax collectors were not popular. They were working for the foreign ruler, Rome, and ran a business of collecting money from their own communities for this enemy. Tax collecting was a business. You won the right to 'harvest' the taxes from an area then it was up to you to gather the money and send the amount Rome was expecting. The extra was yours, a system very open to fraud and rip offs.

READ LUKE 19:1-10

Zacchaeus was up a tree because he was short, but safety may have also been a factor in his seeking this vantage point; crowds were dangerous places for tax collectors. Jesus sees Zacchaeus and says He would eat with him that day.

- 1 How did Zacchaeus respond to Jesus? What change did he announce?
-

2 What was Jesus' response to this announcement?

3 Consider what this interaction tells you about salvation and attitudes to wealth.

READ LUKE 18:18-25

This story of Jesus' interaction with a wealthy young man seems on the surface to contradict His response to Zacchaeus' decision. A wealthy young man wanting to be sure of his salvation approaches Jesus. There is an exchange about following the commandments and with confidence the young man says he has 'kept these since I was a boy'. Jesus then goes to the heart of the issue.

4 What does Jesus ask the young man to do?

5 How does the young man respond?

6 How is this different to the response of Zacchaeus who 'only' gave 50% away?

As John Rinehart mentions, Jesus' followers included Joanna and Susanna, women of some means (Luke 8:3). Two of Jesus' secret followers, who later buried His body, were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both significantly wealthy men (John 19:38-42). Having wealth did not disqualify you from following Jesus.

- 7 What is your interpretation of the 'camel through the eye of the needle' comment?
-

READ MATTHEW 6:19-24

These verses from the teaching of Jesus may help to clarify the issue. This reading comes from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:28) where Jesus talks about trusting God for your future (6:19-34). In the middle of this section Jesus makes the clear point that you can't serve God and money (v 24). In other words, money is not neutral in our lives, it seeks to supplant God's place. When people follow Jesus the importance of money diminishes (Zacchaeus). When money has a firm hold on your life you can refuse to let it go (rich young man).

- 8 Consider in what ways money has the power to supplant God in your life.
-

- 9 What do you do to seek to stop this happening?
-

- 10 When have you most felt you have been struggling in this area?
-

GAME CHANGERS

Few people realise the influence that monasteries and monastic orders have had in the area of capitalist economies and the early development of technologies. Vishal Mangalwadi makes this point in the episode:

'God is not a meditator. The Hindu god is a meditator. The Bible's God is a worker. He works for six days to create. He rests on the seventh, so to be godly means to work for six days; but once sin came in, work became toil. 'You will have to eat of the sweat of your brow', God says to Adam, so toil is curse. Salvation from sin includes salvation from toil. That was the most important theological force creating technology.'

The Benedictine order, one of the first organised monastic movements created by St Benedict (480-547AD), was totally committed to its monks working. They had learnt from the teaching of Paul (2 Thessalonians 3:10) 'if you don't work, you don't eat'. Monks worked but they wanted to redeem work from toil and meaningless labour (see Genesis 3:17-19). Those who ran the monasteries also sought to provide a balance between work, studying God's Word and prayer, hence the more efficient their work practices the better. As Mangalwadi comments, it was a 'theological force' which led to new systems of farming, increased productivity and technological development.

Added to this the monasteries grew to be meritocracies. They believed in putting gifted people in charge (Romans 12:8). Rodney Stark commented on this change in colourful terminology:

'The marvellous thing about the monasteries, of course, is they could make long term economic plans, and they were meritocracies ... because they didn't have to deal with idiot sons. The nobility had to deal with the fact that they had come along with a guy who wasted all the money, but in the monasteries they always took the smart guys and put them in charge. They early on specialised ... consequently it led to a money economy because trade was very inefficient, and so the guys who were making wine bought their food from other places that were raising food. It was an amazing time.'

11 Does this information surprise you or influence your view of monastic orders?

12 What do we learn from the monastic movement about the consequences of wise actions which focus on 'storing treasure in heaven'?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

A piece of advice from Ian Harper (Economist, Melbourne) perhaps sums up much of this episode and the message of Jesus. It's about living the life of the gap:

'Live the life of the gap. In other words, always consume or spend money at a level which is below that which you can afford ... to make way for your giving; and as Christians we are asked to give. God loves a cheerful giver, so we're not under law, but we give, and creating the gap enables us to do that.'

How are you going in living the life of the gap?

What is it about our community that makes this difficult?

How would living the life of the gap influence your giving?

Are there steps that you could take to be sure you have not supplanted God with wealth?

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**“THE WORLD IS RATIONAL
BECAUSE IT WAS CREATED BY
A RATIONAL GOD. THE WORLD
WILL RUN ACCORDING TO
RULES BECAUSE GOD NOT
ONLY CREATED THE BASIS
OF REASON, BUT HE GAVE US
REASON SO THAT WE COULD
UNDERSTAND THINGS.”**

RODNEY STARK

EPISODE 10

REASON & SCIENCE

INTRODUCTION

Jesus taught that there is one God, who created the universe. This idea is common to all the great monotheistic faiths but Jesus further claimed that God is not only actively sustaining His creation each day but that it is possible to personally know this God. Despite the popular stereotype that Christianity is anti-intellectual and anti-scientific, modern education, academia and science are actually rooted in large measure in the teachings of Jesus. Jesus affirmed the existence of genuine truth, He provides grounds for trusting in the power of human reason and motivates the exploration of the world through scientific endeavour.

WATCH EPISODE 10 'REASON & SCIENCE'

GETTING STARTED

- 1 In your experience, what is separating belief in Christian faith and the world of science in western nations?

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

One of the great minds in the history of Christian faith is Thomas Aquinas. He lived in the 13th century and is said to be one of the most brilliant minds of the Middle Ages. Aquinas came to believe that all of what is true is true; that there is not a natural or scientific truth and then a religious truth. Truth is to be pursued. Scientific knowledge and Christian teaching should be appreciated in one coherent action, not in competition with each other. Both come from God and lead to God.

The world in all its grandeur and complexity points to God. This was expressed by writers long before Jesus as they reflected on their world and wrote the Psalms.

READ PSALM 19:1-4

- 2 How do the 'heavens declare the glory of God'?
- 3 How might this thinking shift an individual's attitude to study?

In our present times with many different ways of understanding reality we tend to think that the discussion on 'truth' and what can be stated as being true is a modern problem. But when Pilate was trying to decide on how to deal with Jesus he made a profound statement.

READ JOHN 18:38

- 4 What do you think Pilate was trying to express?
- 5 Is it reasonable to believe that there are things that can be claimed to be true in the spiritual world?
- 6 How do you decide what is true?

READ JOHN 20:24-28

Thomas was struggling with the question of truth after Jesus' death. All the disciples had seen Jesus alive and Thomas, one of the twelve men closest to Jesus, wasn't there at the time. When they told him they had seen Jesus he struggled to believe that it was true.

- 7 Some see Thomas' response as reasonable and others feel he lacked faith. How do you think you would have responded in his situation?
- 8 Reflect on Jesus' response to Thomas' lack of belief; did He condemn Thomas for asking questions?

GAME CHANGERS

In this episode we have discussed the genesis of scientific endeavour and looked at people who we now call scientists. The question historian's grapple with is why did science begin in western Europe in a way it did not in China, India or Asia? It's not that there was a lack of great minds or brilliant people in those nations or cultures!

John Ortberg quotes Alfred North Whitehead when commenting about the rise of science. Whitehead said:

'It was the medieval insistence on the rationality of God.'

Rodney Stark made further comments on this same theme:

'You don't study and look for explanations of how the world works if you don't believe that the world works according to reason. If you look back in the philosophy of China at the time, everybody outside the Christian West believed that the world was incomprehensible because it was an eternal mystery, that you could meditate on it, but it was pointless to try to understand it, because it was un-understandable. The Christians, on the contrary, believed that it could be understood. Some of the very earliest Church Fathers are saying, 'We don't understand this today, but we will.' '

9 Did it surprise you to hear that virtually all of the first scientists were people of Christian faith, primarily ordained priests?

10 How would believing in a rational God lead to pursuing science?

Peter Harrison (Historian and Professor, University of Queensland) commented on the place of science and the place of Christian belief.

To me, fundamentally, there is no genuine conflict. Science tells us stories about how the world is ... but faith is more about values, the purpose of our existence, why we're here ... They're really two quite distinct realms for me. One is about the world, and what science provides us with is fantastic information and great technology. That's a really good thing. It does many good things, but science doesn't answer the fundamental questions that, in my way of thinking, are the most important questions.'

11 If we agree with Aquinas that pursuing truth is a good endeavour, what or where is the limit of science?

12 What does belief in a spiritual life do that a purely scientific world view does not?

In an earlier episode Rico Tice comments:

'We as Christians believe in an open universe; so we believe God made the world and can intervene in the world He made.'

13 Does considering the issue of an open universe influence your world view here?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Have you ever been afraid of study, fearing what you may learn?

How has this series of episodes about Jesus as the Game Changer broadened your understanding of the depth and breadth of influence Jesus had on western democracies and culture?

FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH

Harrison, P. (2015). *The territories of science and religion*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hill, J. (2005). *What has Christianity ever done for us?* Oxford: Lion. (see Chapter 5)

Mangalwadi, V. (2011). *The book that made your world: how the Bible created the soul of Western civilization*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson. (see Chapter 13)

Stark, R. (2011). *The triumph of Christianity: how the Jesus movement became the world's largest religion*. New York NY: Harper Collins. (see Chapter 16)

NOTES

JESUS CHRIST HAS MADE AN INDELIBLE MARK ON HUMAN HISTORY AND HE CONTINUES TO DO SO THROUGH HIS FOLLOWERS. YET MANY PEOPLE DO NOT REALISE THAT THE VALUES WESTERN DEMOCRACIES ARE BUILT ON ORIGINATE IN THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS – THE EQUALITY OF ALL, SERVANT LEADERSHIP, CARE FOR THE POOR AND MARGINALISED, TO NAME JUST A FEW.

IN THIS SERIES, HOST KARL FAASE TRAVELS TO THE UK, USA, SINGAPORE, INDIA AND AUSTRALIA, INTERVIEWING AUTHORS, ACADEMICS AND MODERN-DAY GAME CHANGERS ABOUT HOW THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS CHANGED THE WORLD AND WHY IT MATTERS.

THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE IS TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE **JESUS THE GAME CHANGER** DVD SERIES FOR CHURCHES AND SMALL GROUP STUDY.

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9. WEALTH
10. REASON & SCIENCE



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HOST

KARL IS A WELL KNOWN AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATOR, MEDIA PRESENTER, LEADER AND SOCIAL COMMENTATOR. HE IS THE CEO OF OLIVE TREE MEDIA. KARL IS IN DEMAND ACROSS AUSTRALIA AS A SPEAKER, WITH SPECIAL INTEREST IN ENCOURAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION, LEADERSHIP, MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATING TO THOSE EXPLORING FAITH. WITH OVER 20 YEARS OF INVOLVEMENT IN MEDIA, KARL IS ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST EXPERIENCED CHRISTIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION PRESENTERS.

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