

Truth or Dare? part 1

Luke 24:13-35 (NIV)

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹ "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

What does Jesus want the church to focus on? As believers I think that is probably something we should be clear about.

Alexander Graham Bell advised that in order to achieve we need to:

"Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus." (Alexander Graham Bell)

I think we can agree that one of the top three areas that Jesus calls us to focus on is the great commission:

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

One big plan

Go make disciples – creating lifelong students and followers of Christ

With three key steps

- 1. Baptizing** – lead people to a crucial moment of commitment to Jesus
- 2. Teaching them to obey** – Help people submit every area of life to Jesus
- 3. I will be with you always** – Experience the presence of Jesus

One of the key things that Jesus wants us to focus on is making disciples and if we effectively make disciples then we will both be living out our mandate and experiencing growth and vitality. It's simple, isn't it? – Well maybe it's not quite that simple – otherwise Australia would be knee deep in growing vital churches – right? The complication is always the human factor. The reason the bible is as big as it is because of the human factor. It wouldn't be too hard to fit God's basic message into one book about the size of Mark's gospel, but because we humans complicate matters so much it is a pretty big book. So one of the implications of the human factor is that *in order to effectively make disciples we ourselves need to be effectively disciplined*. Now to understand what that means we need to understand that this great commission is given to a group of people right at the end of a three year intensive discipleship experience that has strongly majored on one thing - the condition of their heart. This heart business is what Jesus is primarily on about all through the gospels. When Jesus explains to another teacher, Nicodemus, the kind of program he is running he makes it very clear that he is into transforming people's hearts, so that they will be born again into something new by the Spirit (John 3:3). This is what Paul is praying for when he prays:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, (Ephesians 1:18)

Paul's prayer for the condition of people's heart is the key to our discipleship because our heart governs the operation of our life:

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. (Matthew 15:19)

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45)

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)

In that last passage Jesus is saying that the condition of our heart, the soil in which the God's word falls, impacts on how the word of God grows in us. Which means that you may well listen to an endless bunch of sermons but how you are growing as a Christian will ultimately depend on where your heart is at.

For example when we start preaching on evangelism what research tells us is that the way people respond to the challenge of evangelism is mostly pre-determined. There are four main responses, firstly a small precious group of evangelists who usually make up about 2% of the congregation, who are totally gifted and comfortable with sharing their faith and just love that you are preaching on this subject. Then there is a second group of around 30% of the congregation who are reasonably well disciplined and reasonably comfortable with evangelism and who have picked up some faith sharing tips along the way that work for them and are happy to hear preaching on evangelism, they are keen to pick up any new strategies or ideas. Then the research suggests that the largest group of around 60% know that they should be excited about evangelism, and they will smile and nod agreeably when the subject comes up, but who secretly struggle with the whole thing and find themselves being unhelpfully tangled up in guilt and as a result do not generally enjoy sermon series on evangelism. Finally there is a smaller group, of around 8% for whom the very idea of just talking about what you believe to another human being is such a traumatic notion that this kind of preaching is a bit of a nightmare.

Christians and faith sharing	% of congregation	Attitude	Response to preaching series on evangelism
Evangelists	2%	Bring it on	Preach it all year!
Confident	30%	I can do that	Great, Just teach me something I can use
Ambivalent	60%	Umm?	Grin and bear it
Broken	8%	Terrified	I would rather be anywhere else

(Lifeway research)

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2012/august/majority-of-churchgoers-never-share-their-faith-lifeway.html>

So why am I saying this? Well at the beginning of my Christian life, when it came to evangelism, I lived on that bottom line, I was one of the broken. The thought of evangelism simply filled me with dread, but because God is good, that's not the end of my story and it does not have to be the end of anyone's story. You see Christ was and is discipling me and giving me a new heart. As God says:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)

So if you are like me, and your heart struggle with sharing your faith then today I want you to hear a message of grace and hope. To understand the story of my heart I need to take you to a moment in my life when I discovered that there was something a little broken in me. I'm about thirteen years old and I'm just making that transition, from when you're running around and chasing and wrestling with your friends, and suddenly you realise that some of your friends are girls and wrestling girls is a whole different ball of wax. But just when that was starting to become interesting the girls wanted to play truth or dare. They were really excited about it,

they were alive and animated by the whole concept. However when the rules of the game were explained to us boys, that we were required to say something embarrassing or do something embarrassing in front of people, girl people, we were not as excited. This was clearly a game invented by girls for girls. I began to feel this funny burning feeling in my stomach and when it came round to my turn it was like my stomach caught fire and I simply had to get up and out of there. As I ran off I heard one of my friends asking the question, 'is he crying?' and I realised that I was crying and that made me cry some more because I didn't understand what was going on, I just felt like a freak.

I carried this truth or dare experience into my adult life without really understanding why I felt like this. Even into my late 20's, the very thought of embarrassment would paralyse me. Deb will tell you that movies portraying people being embarrassed were so uncomfortable for me that I have to leave the room. There are a whole bunch of Woody Allen and Adam Sandler movies that I haven't been able to watch all the way though. It was also impacting on areas of my Christian life. When Preachers would preach about evangelism and faith sharing the very idea would give me that truth or dare burning feeling in my gut and I still really didn't know why. But the good news was that I am a disciple of Jesus and one of the things that Jesus does is heal what's broken in his people because *He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds*. (Psalm 147:3).

You see that's what he was doing with those two sad disciples on the road to Emmaus, with great gentleness and sensitivity he was helping them to heal their confusion and grief so they could become effective in the work of Jesus. For anyone who may be struggling to live out your Christian life I want you to hear about how understanding and gentle and sensitive is our God and that he will help you to get through whatever it is that you are going through, he will disciple you.

This is how He disciplined me. One day, Jesus simply dropped into my spirit, why it was that I was the way that I was. He reminded me of a terrible experience two years before the truth or dare moment. In that experience I had been in my new Kiwi school for about six months and I felt terribly out of place. I was a minister's kid, not a normal kid, I was an Aussie Kid, not a kiwi kid, and I was a kid in a calliper, I was a weirdo. A calliper was a metal leg brace, which I had to wear because of a rare hip disease called Perthes which disrupted the flow of blood to my ball joint and the ball joint literally died and part of the treatment was this calliper. Anyway, on this particular day there was a school swimming carnival and apparently the rule was that everyone had to compete in something. So as I was sitting with my calliper watching the swimming and a teacher came over to me and said I that had to swim in an event because it was a rule. I tried to explain I hadn't walked unassisted for about two years and I hadn't done any swimming, but that didn't seem to cut any ice with him and he told me that I could swim in the kick board race. So I struggled into my trunks, that's what kiwis called speedos back in the day, and I came out onto the pool deck to discover that the kick board race was for kindergarten kids and I was in year six. The second thing I discovered after the gun had gone off was that I really couldn't move my legs all that much and as a consequence I came last in a race with a bunch of little kids half my age and I couldn't make it across and I stood up in the middle of the pool and in front of the whole school I burst into the tears and the

teachers last words to me were; “don’t be such a cry baby”. As Jesus began to heal that memory He helped me name that burning feeling in my stomach, humiliation and shame.

Now this is, by a long shot, not the most terrible thing that ever happened to a little kid, but it really twisted me up in a couple of ways. Firstly, I didn’t understand what this experience had done to me, it was just I had these weird feelings that seemed to be out of my control. But thankfully Jesus is all about helping us understand the truth and you know what the truth does, it sets us free (John 8:32). Secondly, these feelings were making it really difficult for me to do some fundamental Christian activities, such as those awkward relationship building things and taking risks and possibly being embarrassed. But Jesus took the heat out of that memory so that I could go back to that time and place without feeling overwhelmed and then I got to tell that teacher in my heart what his callousness had done to me and then I got to forgive him, which was probably the hardest part.

Secondly and for me kind of expectedly, Jesus helped me to see that He takes terrible things like this and he redeems them and he makes us better people as a consequence. This is what God does with Joseph who was devastated to be sold into slavery by his brothers but after God had disciplined him he could say to his brothers from his heart:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20)

And Paul says:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 (NIV)

Paul teaches us that God’s grace is all that we need because God’s power can be seen perfectly transforming our weaknesses into his opportunities (2 Corinthians 12:9). I believe this, I know it to be true. At this point in my life I am ready and able to cope with truth or dare moments. I want to dare to speak Gods truth in whatever company I find myself but now I also have this secret weapon, which out of my weakness God has given me a whole lot of respect for how truly fragile humans beings can be. This is the secret that Jesus taught big mouth Pete, who said;

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, (1 Peter 3:15)

Gentleness and respect. Last year I was in a pub in Narrabri, I had abandoned Deb to watch a football final. About half way through the game I became aware of a disturbance at the front door of the pub. As I peered out into the gloom I could see a shadowing group of indigenous young men and women and they seemed to be having angry words with one of the barmen. Then suddenly one of the young indigenous men pushed past the barmen and stomped over to the bar and sat down right next to me, challenging everyone in that room, that this was his town too - interspersed with a whole lot of swearing. I thought it was pretty gutsy thing to do, his friends had stayed outside, and he was alone in a pub full of white fellas. Even so the younger version of me would not have had the courage to enter into such an

awkward conversation, but Jesus has been discipling me and so I turned to the young fella and held out my hand. He looked at it suspiciously and said; what's that for? And I swear this is the word that Jesus put on my heart, I just said; "respect", and he burst into a radiant smile which transformed his whole face and I brought him a drink and we began to talk and the pub gradually went back to normal.

I want to challenge you in two ways today. Firstly, if you feel deeply uncomfortable about sharing your faith then it is time you began to look for some healing. To help with this on Tuesday week, May 2nd, Warren Ling and I are hosting a short little seminar here in the church which we are calling "Easy Share". The Gideon's have developed a method of sharing the gospel which is dead easy and Warren reckons he can teach you how to do it in about 15 minutes flat. We'll spend just under an hour giving you some clues, helpful hints and role playing faith sharing and then you will have plenty of time to go back to your life groups and talk about what you have just done.

Secondly I want to challenge you that when you hear the word of God and it makes you uncomfortable – don't resist it - understand that generally it is a good thing, that *a point of discomfort is often offering us an opportunity for growth*; because the word of God...

...is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Let's pray inviting God to keep on discipling us

Next Sunday in part 2 of truth or dare, "The Beautiful Exchange", why we simply have to introduce people to Jesus.