

Truth or Dare? part 3

Natural Evangelism

Luke 5:27-32 (NIV)

²⁷ After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, ²⁸ and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. ²⁹ Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ³¹ Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Thank you for those people who sent us notes of encouragement after we confessed some of our technological struggles last Sunday. However this week has suggested that technological humiliation is a gift that keeps on giving. For a few days Deb has watched me deal with our new key-less-lock technology in the following way. I would take I took out the remote from my pocket and use it to unlock the car and then locked the door in the same way when I get out, just the way I've been doing it for twenty years, so don't judge. After a few days of watching me do this my beloved gently asked a question; "do you really understand how this key-less lock works"? Do I understand? Do I understand? There are many questions you can ask a man, but to question his understanding of cars, is just, well, it's crossing a line. For generations the men in my family have cajoled carburettors' and flushed fuel lines. My father used to pull out engines with his bare hands and twist off the spark plugs with his teeth. There is petrol in our blood. I have driven in Bathurst, the streets of Bathurst, on the way to the race. I have spoken to Peter Brocks ... dermatologist. Do I understand about cars! Somewhere in the middle of my soliloquy on men's genetic dominance over cars, Deb interrupted with a second equally unsettling question, "do you know about the button on the door handle"? Somehow, I stifled an almost overwhelming desire to shriek, "what button"? I pushed that thought deep down inside of me and instead I called on all those generation of men genes and said very nonchalantly, yeh!

When God chiselled the commandment "do not lie", naturally he wasn't talking about things like this. Paul promises that we will not be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13) and this is clearly unbearable. So I went into the house and waited until Deb wasn't looking and snuck out and sure enough there was a button on the door handle, and if you pressed it, the car would unlock with the keys still in your pocket. Oh my goodness, I had an epiphany. This changes everything! This is a whole new paradigm; that I would have worked out all by myself, if I wasn't so preoccupied with other things.

Any way I probably should be talking a little bit about God. We've called this current preaching series Truth or Dare because it's about daring to tell the truth about our Faith. I believe that the Bible focuses on this question in a very particular way. That how we tell the world and how we show the world about our faith, has everything to

do with what God is doing in your heart and my heart right now. To understand this better we have been looking closely at some biblical case studies in which the changes Jesus makes in people's hearts unlocks their capacity to be involved in the mission of God. In week 1 we looked at Luke's story of the two grieving and confused disciples on their way to Emmaus, literally leaving the church because it was all too hard. But Jesus comes to them and walks with them and goes to work on their heart and as a result they go through a 360 degree change, they go back to the church and they become witnesses about what Jesus is doing in their life.

Last week we were in Luke 7 with the woman who washed Jesus feet with her tears, and we explored how receiving a beautiful exchange of grace from Jesus had given her a new heart with a new capacity to demonstrate her love for God. This week we are looking at Jesus recruiting the tax collector Levi. Now Luke has a genius for nailing big complicated issues clearly and with just a few words. In this short story Luke manages to outline a complete evangelism strategy.

Natural Evangelism

1. See people

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, (Luke 5:27)

His parents' named him Levi, a priest's name and if they were still alive at the time of this story, they would probably have been deeply disappointed with what their son had done with his life. The Romans found it expedient to contract locals to collect taxes on behalf of the empire. So at some point Levi took the Romans up on their offer, he made a decision that the commission he would make collecting taxes outweighed the cost of being hated for being a traitor. Around the tax table was a platoon of Roman soldiers keeping an eye on the empire's money and making sure that their local collectors weren't accidentally knifed in the back. If looks could kill Levi would have been dead a long time ago. Most people pretended he just wasn't there or they made it very clear that they couldn't wait to get out of that place. Their eyes would flick towards him and then flick away as if even looking at his traitorous face for any length of time might contaminate them in some way. Levi experienced that every day, day after day, what do you think that does to your heart?

On this day Levi, noticed a visiting religious teacher looking at him, watching him, it was very unsettling. Religious teachers were not his favourite people. In the synagogue when teachers were illustrating what unfaithful, corrupt and sinful Jews looked like, he was at the top of their list, just above sex workers. You see this is what religion does, it makes lists that become laws that lock people out of love and compassion. You see it happening when couples love for each other turns into lists. Lists of what each other should have done, lists of what each other has done and shouldn't have done. Those lists lock people out of love. Life becomes as brittle and inflexible as the old wine skins that Jesus spoke about (Luke 5:37) which is why Jesus wants to gift us with new wine and new wine skins.

So you can understand that Levi might get a little twitchy as he became aware that he was being watched by a leader of the lists, a religious teacher, but then he connects with Jesus eye to eye. There are 43 muscles in the face controlled by the

seventh cranial nerve, and they work together like a symphony to create an incredibly effective communications platform. People say a lot by the look on their face. I would pay big money for some of the biblical eye witnesses to describe the look on Jesus face at moments like this. Unfortunately they didn't, but what we do have is a record of how people responded to what they saw in Jesus face, plus the very brief things that Jesus sometimes said like; "follow me".

2. Send invitations

and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:28)

My wife Deb, for those who know who well, know she is quite a wise person, even about cars, though perhaps not about men's feelings. Anyway Deb has been telling me for years not to decide for people. What she means by that is that sometimes I decide, no they wouldn't want to do this or that, or they wouldn't want to lead a life group or go out on mission, so sometimes I wouldn't invite people and they wouldn't have the opportunity to hear the initiation of God, which is a serious matter because Jesus is all about the invitation. Don't decide your neighbour doesn't want to go to church, invite them and let them decide. Don't decide your friends wouldn't want to join your life group, invite them and let them decide.

Jesus invites! - *Follow me*, he said, *and Levi got up, left everything and followed him*. Never underestimate the power of invitation because invitation is love in action. In giving someone an invitation we are saying I want you and I need you and that is a very powerful message. Isn't it the essence of love? I want you and I need you. When you understand the power of that kind of invitation, you can understand why Levi left all that money, all that income, all that security, because of the invitation he saw in Jesus face and the invitation he heard in Jesus words.

Levi saw someone seeing him, knowing him, wanting him, needing him. If you get that kind of revelation about people like Levi and you invite them to follow Jesus, they will find it very difficult to say no. It's interesting to note that very shortly after joining the disciples Levi was given a new name, changed from Levi, which in Hebrew roughly meant "my parents had sex" which when you think about it is not all that special, to Matthew which means Gift of God, which is really special name. That's what Jesus does, he sees us and he invites us and gives us a new sense of who we are.

3. Share truth

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

Luke points out that when Jesus loves you, this I know, you just don't keep on singing the song, you go and share the love. Levi does that by connecting the dots of his life. He brings together his old work mates with Jesus and they have a meal together. This is natural evangelism, connecting the dots of our life in authentic relationships. It is invitational without being confrontational. Having said that we also need to be like Paul who was *not ashamed of the gospel* (Romans 1:16).

I shared a story with the Easy Share group on Tuesday, which was a really encouraging night. Over 40 people in our congregation got together around the

subject of evangelism. So I was sharing this story about a man who spoke to me after the funeral of a close friend. He was really struggling with the knowledge that in fifty years of friendship he never really invited his friend to know how important Jesus had been in his own life, he never shared that truth, he never gave that invitation and it was something he deeply regretted.

4. Scrap Judgements

But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" (Luke 5:30)

So far Luke has been saying, well this is how we do it in the Jesus movement. We see people for who they are, we send out loving invitations and we share truth. This next bit is the, "but this is what we don't do" part of the deal, we don't judge. All through the four gospels that contrast between Jesus welcoming approach and the Pharisees judging approach is highlighted again and again because all of us are just one heartbeat away from losing our relationship with Jesus and ending up with a religion that trades joy for judgement. This is why Paul went nuts, absolutely nuts over the Galatian church, because they began in relationship but ended up in religion.

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (Galatians 3:1-3)

Jesus makes it very simple for us, he commands us not to judge (Matthew 7:1), however we need to be clear what Jesus means by that because it's a command that is often misunderstood and misused. What Jesus is talking about is eternal judgements, judgements about whether people are worthy or wanted by God. When the Pharisees complained to the disciples about eating with tax collectors and sinners it was on the basis of a judgement that these people are not on God's list, that God could not possibly want to have anything to do with them. The irony of all that was that the Son of God himself was eating with these sinners and tax collectors, but that was entirely lost on the Pharisees. So not judging, is not about discerning right from wrong, we still have to do that, as lovingly as we can. This judging is about making eternal judgements that we are neither authorised nor qualified to make and dramatically impact the way people feel about Christians and relate to them. It is not possible to have a belief system that judges whether people are worthwhile or not and not have that leak into everything you do and say as a church. The answer is not to judge.

5. Seek growth

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32)

Jesus says he is like a doctor whose goal is not to leave people in the same state that he found them in, but to change them, to make them well, to help them grow in their relationship with God. So what do you want for the people you love? What do

you want for your kids in their relationship with God? What do you want for your friends? Because what we want for people informs the things that we do and say and the clearer we are about what we want for people the clearer those things will be to the people we love.

So do you see what I mean about Luke? He manages to package this whole natural evangelism strategy in a few short lines. It's a simple strategy, we see people for who they are, we send out loving invitations, we share truth, we scrap judgements and we seek growth.

Natural Evangelism

1. See people
2. Send invitations
3. Share truth
4. Scrap Judgements
5. Seek growth

Lastly while this Natural Evangelism is a good biblical strategy, one that I encourage everyone to put into practice, next week we want to look at a different biblical model, Supernatural Evangelism through another of Luke's stories, Philip and the Ethiopian unique (Acts 8:26-40). At the same time we will be challenging people with a unique opportunity to stretch and grow your faith so that's going to be a little interesting. Let's pray