

4. Discipleship in Tough Times - Bible Study

In my lecture I will be making the case that when the going gets tough... (try if you can to resist completing!) we should try to follow Jesus even closer. This might sound like a cliché but it has a radical and challenging underpinning.

For example, David Bosch, in his ground breaking book "Transforming Mission," tracks how 'mission' has been understood throughout the history of the Church. His research leads him to suggest that in the West we have tended to concentrate on the final chapters of the Gospels i.e. the death and resurrection of Jesus and the good news of salvation that this brings. However, David Bosch reminds us that there is also good news in that Jesus came not just to die for our sins but also to show us how to live.

So when the going gets tough we look to Jesus to show us how to live, and when we look at the way in which Jesus lived his life on earth it contrasts starkly to the achievement of profit, power and status which dominate our world. Jesus demonstrates a completely alternative 'performance'.

Jesus lived his life in a very distinctive way.

This included:

- **Eschewing Power** - Being alert to how easy it might be for him to become powerful in the land. He seems to make a point of resisting the things that would lead to him becoming powerful in the world's terms. (NB Being powerful and being authoritative are not the same thing)
- **Willing to risk being overwhelmed** - Always risking the possibility that he might be overwhelmed, not feeling he has to be in control all the time and being willing to take risks that are likely to make people furious with him
- **Subverting the 'status quo'** - Challenging the taken-for granted ways of doing things and

- understanding things, including religious practice
- **Wide 'fraternal' relations** - Seeing our concern for others as going well beyond our own family or neighbours or 'tribe'. If God is our heavenly Father all his children become our brothers and sisters.
- **Avoiding tit-for tat' behaviour** – Avoiding escalating differences and trying to get one's own back and have the last word – but also standing his ground
- **Investing in the most unlikely** – The people whom Jesus chose were not the most obvious 'top team', in fact very often they were people whom others had written-off.

Questions

1. *Chose one of the Gospels to read through from beginning to end. It might take up to an hour.*

As you are reading, note the distinctive ways in which Jesus 'performs'. The bullet points above may provide some pointers. Are there distinctive things other than these that you what to note? What are these?
2. *Try completing the following sentence: What I like about Jesus is the way he....*
3. *What about this word 'performance'? The word performance is not meant to imply something false but rather something that we have to rehearse and keep practicing. You could say that spirituality is the means by which we rehearse the alternative performance demonstrated by Jesus i.e. allowing head and heart to prefigure our actions.*
4. *Do you have an aspect of the way Jesus lived his life that really warms your heart? i.e. A favourite aspect of Jesus performance that you want to rehearse and practice?*

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