

#7. Being Human – Final Talk (10/03/24, Keith Brindle)

Readings: Ephesians 3:14-21

This last session is particularly sensitive and personal. The questions that were asked during the talk, with the help of the extended list of susceptible/capability pairings that Keith provided (below), may be referred back to, and discussed, if appropriate for your CG.

1. How have you found the 'Being Human' teaching sessions?
 - a. What has been of benefit to you?
 - b. What have you found to be usefully challenging?
 - c. Where have you found God at work in you through the talk and HG questions/meetings?
 - d. What has not been so helpful?
2. Keith talked about how being at church, and being religious, doesn't guarantee change.
 - a. Do you recognise this as a reality? (No bitching or naming names, please! Self-reflection is probably best here!)
 - b. Could you challenge this view.
3. Keith stated that giving the simple 'Jesus is the answer' response to people's vulnerabilities and struggles isn't helpful and can lead to a dishonest community of mask-wearers, who are afraid to drop their façade.
 - a. Do you recognise this as a reality? Discuss what the symptoms might be.
 - b. How might Connect Groups, and meeting up in smaller groups to pray/chat, help?
4. Keith discussed 4 'ways' through which real Christ-like change can happen in us. (Read through the 4 ways listed below.)
 - a. Discuss, if you can, your experiences of any one of these four ways? How have they changed you?
 - b. What has brought about the biggest Christ-like changes in you?
 - c. Are there other 'ways' that you have experiences that have brought about real lasting Christ-like change in you?
5. There are a lot of good people outside the church, who will never set foot inside the church.
 - a. Is following Jesus just about changing into a better person? (What does the Bible teach?)
 - b. If Jesus' love, truth, justice and mercy attracted some of the most broken, lost, sinful, rejected people, what should our church look like compared the surrounding community? ('Come as you are' says the banner outside St James)
 - c. Christ died for the good as well as the not so good? How do we share God's love to those who are seen as being good people?
6. If we are saved, and one day we'll be off to heaven, does it even matter if we change (if we become the person we are capable of, rather than remain the person we are susceptible to being)?
 - a. Is the promise of heaven all it's about?
 - b. What about bring heaven on earth? How does being a changed person help bring that about?
 - c. Should encountering God's love not bring about a desire for change in us, as well as the inspiration to do so?
 - d. How authentic and powerful is our witness to others unchanged by our faith?
7. Keith talked about the refiner's fire (mentioned last week by Sarah Mallet) as God's pure love for you. What is your response to that understanding of His refining fire being the fire of His love for you? How does it feel to (choose to) stand in that fire?
8. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. Words and knowledge are not enough. What else, from the reading, is essential?
9. A slightly different question to end on. Do you prefer teaching series that focus on particular aspects of life, such as the Being Human series, or ones that focus on a Book of the Bible? Please give an explanation for your answer (CG leaders please feedback responses to this question to keithbrindle@stjamesdevizes.org)

The 4 ways you are changed:

1. You experience a crisis of limitation (the shit hits the fan in your life)
2. You experience trauma and pain
3. You experience God's love
4. You experience God's love through Jesus and the Holy Spirit

Susceptible to – Capable of:

Hatred/Violence - Love/Reconciliation . Foolishness – Wisdom. Meanness – Generosity. Half-hearted/Unfaithful – Committed. Demanding – Patient. Jealousy - Contentment/Gratitude. Arrogance – Humility. Selfishness – Sacrifice. Deceit/Duplicity - Integrity/Honesty. Capriciousness - Reliability/consistency. Defensiveness – Openness. Argumentative – Graciousness. Sarcasm – Gentle. Apathy – Compassion. Cowardice – Courage. Fearful/Anxiety - Peace/Hope. Suspicious – Trusting. Rudeness/Thoughtlessness - Respectfulness/Helpfulness. Resentment – Forgiveness.

#6. Being Human – Demanding versus Patient (03/03/24, Sarah Mallett)

Readings: Psalm 78:18-22 & James 5:7-11

1. Sarah spoke about the 24 character strengths which all humans possess in varying degrees. Which do you think are your own strengths? If it is easier, what do you think are the strengths of the other members of your connect group? ([Link to the online quiz is here if you want to do it another time!](#))
2. Sarah spoke about three types of patience – Interpersonal patience, Life Hardship patience and Daily Hassles patience. Do you think this list is complete or are there other types of patience? Which are you good at and which do you struggle with? Are there particular circumstances which make you lose patience?
3. Read Psalm 78:18-22. The Israelites have just been released from slavery in Egypt and immediately start being demanding and impatient. Why do you think this is?
 - a. Is it to do with losing some sense of control?
 - b. Why do we find it hard to let God be in control?
4. What do you think of when you think of patience?
 - a. Is it just about waiting?
5. Read and discuss James 5:7-11. A farmer does not encourage crops to grow passively. What do you think of the Bruce Lee quote “Patience is not passive. On the contrary it is concentrated strength”?
6. Where in the Bible do we see other examples of patience or lack of patience?
 - a. What were the reasons or situations?
 - b. Can we learn from these examples?
7. Sarah discussed how patience is a fruit of the Spirit. Discuss how we can receive more of the fruits of the Spirit, including different ways we can connect with God.
8. What do you think of the story of the silversmith holding the silver in the fire to refine it, as God refines us to make us more and more reflect his image?
9. What do you think it means for us as Christians to be fully “human”?

#5. Being Human – Lukewarm versus Committed (25/02/24, Keith Brindle)

Reading: Revelation 2:15-20

1. Can you think of people who you admire, or have aspects about them that are worth emulating, that have demonstrated a long commitment to what they do? (This may be a Christian or not; someone well-known or only known by you.)
 - a. What is it about them that is admirable/ worth emulating?
2. What are the things that you are committed to?
 - a. Are there any common factors that make your commitments easier?
 - b. Do these factors have any parallels in your faith journey?
3. In what areas of life do you find it hard to be committed? (Keith answers, 'Exercise')
 - a. Are there any common factors that undermine your commitments? (Keith answers, 'Hard work' & 'The reward is not instant')
 - b. Do these factors have any parallels in your faith journey? (Keith answers, 'Yes, those areas of faith that require hard work, and don't give an immediate result, are much harder to commit to.')
4. There can be some areas of faith which you are more committed to and others that you are lukewarm about.
 - a. What are the areas of faith you feel most committed to?
 - b. What are the areas of faith you feel most lukewarm about?
 - c. What factors are at play that impact your level of commitment to different aspects of faith (this is a similar questions to 1.b. and 2.b., and could be used instead.)
5. Read Revelation 2:15-20.
 - a. In what ways could St James be similarly lukewarm to the church in Laodicea?
 - b. What similar factors might be at play in Laodicea and St James?
6. Below is the 'It can happen...' statements that Keith used in his talk about our susceptibility to becoming lukewarm. Do any resonate with your own experience? What could you do/pray for to shift from lukewarm to becoming more committed?
 - a. a new relationship changes our relationship with God
 - b. incrementally/unconsciously over time
 - c. suddenly due to some specific incident
 - d. the things that separate us from God and from others are not addressed (sin)
 - e. covid pandemic, the lockdowns, the uncertainty that resulted
 - f. a change in life circumstances
 - g. our relationship with Jesus is superficial and the roots don't run deep
 - h. we lose the joy we had when we first encountered Him
 - i. we forget His faithfulness to us
 - j. the worries of this life overwhelm us
 - k. the lure of wealth and the accumulation of stuff and a comfortable life choke us
 - l. our faith is dependent upon an outcome that God doesn't seem to deliver on
 - m. we make it about a religious thing, or a dogmatic thing, or a style thing, or a tradition thing, or a "I want-it-my-way" thing
 - n. we are let down by the church, or by our brothers and sisters in Christ
 - o. we consciously choose to change our commitments
 - p. we unconsciously allow our priorities to drift (eg. our regular church engagement)
7. How do you respond to Keith's comment that your own discipleship is your own responsibility?
 - a. In what ways do you feel you are responsible for your own discipleship?
 - b. In what ways do you feel you are not responsible for your own discipleship?
 - c. What can you put in place to enable you to grow as a committed follower of Jesus?
8. Keith ended his talk with a list of ways in which Jesus is radically committed to you, to everyone, to all he created, and to his Father; and the challenge to each one of us to follow Jesus with the same radical commitment.
 - a. In what areas of your discipleship are you being challenged to 'follow me' with a greater commitment?
 - b. Though you are responsible for your own discipleship you do not (should not!) journey alone. Who is helping you 'follow me'? And how? Who are you helping to be a Jesus follower? And how?

Re Q7. The challenge for each of us is to recognise that though some of the 'It can happen...' statements are not of our choosing (6.c.e.f.j.k.), we still have a choice about how we respond (we still have agency), and there are things we can do to help us in our response/choice (hence Q7.c.) - such as be part of a Connect Group.

#4. Being Human – Meanness versus Generosity (11/02/24, Mike Wilmott)

Readings: Luke 12 v 13 – 21; 2 Corinthians 9 v 6-11

If you weren't able to be at the 11 am service, try and watch the service online, including the part after the first chunk of worship and before Mike's talk.

Don't worry about working through all the questions, but try and end with enough time to reflect and discuss Q 9.

1. Read the parable of the rich fool – Luke 12 v 13-21. Was it his (extravagant?) wealth that Jesus condemned? Is being financially rich something that we should be condemning?
2. What do you think Jesus is getting at in v 21 – what do you think he means when he urges his listeners to 'be rich towards God'? What does this look like in practice?
3. Often in the parables that Jesus tells, it is instructive to look at the context. In this case, Jesus is approached (v 13) by a man who asks him to intervene in a dispute with his brother over an inheritance. Why do you think Jesus responds in the way he does (v 14-15)? How susceptible are we to being distracted by wealth and material possessions? If a person's life does not consist of the abundance of his possessions, as Jesus says, what should it be marked by?
4. The story of Zacheus (Luke 19 1-10) shows that transformation away from a susceptibility to meanness, greed and exploitation is thankfully possible. Try putting yourself in Zacheus's shoes – what do you think prompts Zacheus to such a generous response in v8?
5. When you think of 'generosity', what is it that first comes to mind? Is generosity always about what we do with our financial resources? What else could it encompass?
6. Mike talked about generosity encompassing our attitude towards others with whom we might disagree. Are we susceptible to thinking that our way is the only correct way? What could be the dangers of thinking along these lines? If you have time, reflect on the approach Jesus takes to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and the woman caught in adultery (John 8). Note that in both instances, Jesus disagreed with them (eg John 4 v 22; 8 v 11b) – but he also refused to condemn them and instead of distancing himself, engaged with them. His counter-cultural generous approach saved both women.....what can we learn from his attitude and actions?
7. In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul is writing to the church in Corinth urging them onward in their promise of financial aid to other churches and commending their generosity. However, such generous financial giving appears to yield rewards that go beyond the mere financial. What benefits does Paul suggest the Corinthians will gain through their financial generosity? (v8; v10-11). Where is the source of these blessings? Why do you think generosity in financial matters may lead to a wider practice of generosity? ('In all things at all times.....you will abound in every good work'; Finally, what does such generosity lead to? (v11b -13)
8. In some Anglican Orders of Service, the congregational response 'All things come from you and of your own do we give you' is included. This is a quotation from the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 29 v 14). Do we treat our gifts, talents, time and resources as gifts from God? How can we be more purposeful in putting this into practice?
9. In what ways is God calling you to be more generous?

#3. Being Human – Foolishness versus Wisdom (04/02/24, Keith Brindle)

Reading: Proverbs 1:1-7. 1 Corinthians 1:20-25

1. How would you define foolishness?
2. How would you define wisdom?
3. Who are the wise people you know? What is it that makes them wise?
4. Proverbs 1:7, in the introduction to the book of Proverbs, states that 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.' How do you understand 'fear of the Lord'?
5. Keith talked about our ultimate fear as a life (this life as well as the next) without God (his love, justice, mercy, grace and wisdom). Does this help you understand 'fear of the Lord'?
6. How, in a balanced and healthy way, could/should 'fear of the Lord' impact upon
 - a) How you prioritise and spend your time
 - b) How you prioritise and spend your money
 - c) How you consider and use the power you have in the your relationships at home, work, etc
7. Recognising that you can be both foolish (not being wise in how you live) and also wise, how do you humbly examine yourself before the God? (Depending on our character we either tend toward not doing this often enough and/or superficially, or we have a unhealthy sense of our guilt and over-indulge in negative self-examination).
8. Such self-examination should lead to thankfulness to God for his grace for those times of wisdom, and to repentance and forgiveness for times of foolishness. Do you take the time to be thankful, and to repent and seek forgiveness?
9. Keith stated that 'wisdom aids community' and that 'foolish that seeks to serve self alone, pulls community into chaos.' In the areas of power, money and sex can you see how in your life, the lives of those around you and in the news headlines how this is the case? (According to Tom Wright, every sin and foolishness of humanity falls into one of these 3 categories, as a misuse or abuse of God's gifts.)
10. How, as a church and as individuals, in a culture where the love, wisdom and power of the Cross is not registered, do we share Christ crucified to our family, friends, neighbours and local community?

#2. Being Human – Violence versus Reconciliation (28/01/24, Richard Saint)

Reading: Matthew 5:21-26, 43-48

1. What makes you angry? Why do these things make you angry?
 - a) What does it feel like to be angry?
2. In Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus equates being angry to murder. What do you think of this?
 - a) We might think, “really?” Now, consider the idea that being angry has the same heart attitude as murder. What do you think of this idea?
3. Perhaps this is still a bit heavy and tricky to fully comprehend. Consider the following illustration of wildfires (pictures included to aid those who are more pictorial):
 - a) The majority of wildfires are not started by large and dramatic things like petrol cans, flamethrowers, or explosions. Rather, it is usually a tiny, seemingly insignificant spark. The small spark sets a small fire, and this in turn spreads, grows, and becomes uncontrollable.
 - b) This is the same effect as anger. Anger is the small spark, that sets a small fire, which in turn leads to spread and growth into something larger, something uncontrollable, something that threatens to engulf us and others.



4. This imagery is taken from the book of James 3:5-6
 - a) How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire!
 - i. What do you think this verse means regarding the potential of anger and its impact?
5. In Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus expands on this idea, calling us not simply to resist anger but to actually love those we are angry with (our enemies).
 - a) How easy do you find it to love those you are angry with? To cultivate love and prayer rather than kindling anger?
6. Richard introduced the idea that if our susceptibility is anger, our capability (through God’s grace) is reconciliation. What do you think of the word reconciliation?
 - a) Richard used the phrases “restorative action” and “relational activity” to describe reconciliation. It is a choice to act. A fire requires dealing with if it isn’t to spread and consume – this is the same with anger. What do you think these two phrases mean and could look like in your relationships?
7. Richard introduced the idea that we are called to reconcile because God has first reconciled us.
 - a) Romans 5:10-11 “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God”, and “through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”
 - b) What do you think about the idea that God, while we were still his enemies, reconciled us (brought us home to him)?
8. Richard finished with the phrase, “As God reconciled us to himself, bringing us home, we also are to be reconcilers.”
 - a) Who do you need to be a reconciler for?
9. If you feel comfortable to do so, share with your connect group a situation in which you are struggling with anger or where reconciliation is needed.
 - a) Pray together for each other that God, through his grace, would enable reconciliation in your life and would remind you of his reconciling of you to himself, bringing you home.

#1. Being Human – an Introduction (14/01/24, Richard Saint)

Reading: Romans 7:14-25a

1. If someone arrived on earth from a distant planet, how would you describe what “being human” is like?
 - a) Newspaper headlines often label people as either wholly good or wholly bad – why do you think they do this? Is it an accurate way of thinking about people?
2. Richard repeatedly used the phrase, “We are all susceptible to sin and tempted by many things and yet we are capable, through God’s grace, of wonderful things.”
 - a) What do you think of this phrase? Do you recognise it in your own life and those around you?
3. The Bible doesn’t try to pretend that humans are simple, it tells the truth about what we are like.
 - a) Gen 1:27 – So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” – At the point of creation, people were declared as “good”, not complicated – simply good. But, through the choices and decisions of all people, sin entered the world and the image of God which people had been created in was severely damaged and distorted – people became complicated.
 - b) Why do you think it is good that the Bible doesn’t put forward a pretend depiction of being human?
4. The Systematic Theologian, Wayne Grudem describes it like this:
 - a) “Since [humankind] has sinned, [a person] is certainly not as fully like God as [they were] before. [Their] moral purity has been lost and [their] sinful character certainly does not reflect God’s holiness. [Their] intellect is corrupted by falsehood and misunderstanding; [their] speech no longer continually glorifies God; [their] relationships are often governed by selfishness rather than love, and so forth. Though [a person] is still in the image of God, in every aspect of life some parts of that image have been distorted or lost”
 - b) What do you think of this description of our fallen nature?
5. Richard used some examples from Scripture of what it is to be human (susceptible and yet capable) – Jacob, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul. Discuss in more detail these people, their susceptibilities and capabilities, or use your own examples to explore what it is to be human.
6. Read Romans 7:14-25a (focussing on vv15, 19, 24, 25a)
 - a) What strikes you about this passage and these verses?
 - b) Do you recognise Paul’s depiction of being human in your own life?
 - i. What susceptibilities do you struggle with and what capabilities do you enjoy?
7. We are still capable of great things because of God’s grace, given to us as a gift.
 - a) Richard used the illustration of “image restoration” to describe the work of God in our lives. Just as The Repair Shop master painter (Lucia) restores damaged and distorted images, the Great Master Image Restorer (God) works painstakingly on restoring the image of God in us.
 - i. What do you think of this illustration? How does it help you to think of the work of God’s grace in your life?
8. As we continue through this series, you may find it hard to be faced with the reality of life. Richard asked us to be mindful of two things: Pride and Shame. Use the following points to pray for each other to be reminded of God’s work in us and pray for protection from guilt and shame.
 - a) Firstly, when you have got it right (when you have been able to do the good that you want to do) – don’t revel in pride – It is by God’s grace alone that we are capable
 - i. **Philippians 2:13** – For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
 - b) Secondly, when you have got it wrong (when you have done the very thing you hate) – don’t wallow in shame – Through God’s mercy we are forgiven and by choosing to follow Jesus, we can be called righteous in the eyes of God. We may, in this life, still face consequences of our sinful actions but...
 - i. **Romans 8:1-2** – There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.