

BIBLE STUDIES

STORIES THAT CAN INSPIRE THE HEART

Excerpt from 'Not Religion but Love'

DAVE ANDREWS



surrender your life to the radical call of jesus

Our desire is to see the Church follow Jesus' radical call amongst the margins.

It is our hope that as you study the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, you will be inspired to be personally involved in expressions of Christ's call to the poor and marginalised.


These Bible studies were written by our dear friend Dave Andrews, who has challenged the SURRENDER community over many years, and has continued to be a prophetic voice to the Church.

As you go through the Bible studies, let us know how what you're learning, and what actions you are taking by posting on social media (using hashtag #Jesusinthemargins) or emailing us your stories.

The Bible studies are an excerpt from Dave Andrews' book 'Not Religion but Love – Practising a Radical Spirituality of Compassion', published by Wipf & Stock.
[CLICK HERE](#) to purchase Dave's book.

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STORIES THAT CAN INSPIRE THE HEART

The stories Christ told, and the stories told about Christ, can be an invaluable resource for those who want to be involved in working for growth and change. Like a road map for a traveller exploring unfamiliar territory, they give us direction. I once suggested to my father, a preacher of note who teaches potential preachers how to preach, that the best thing he could do for the community was proclaim a moratorium on preaching. He was horrified but kindly asked me to explain. I told him I thought the time could be used better by getting the large congregation to break up into small groups to study the stories of Christ and seek to live out the storylines in their own lives. I am convinced that it is only as we allow the stories of Christ to reframe our involvement in the community that we will be able to practise what we preach.

My father never did proclaim a moratorium on preaching, but both of us have done our best to help groups of people study the stories of Christ. Both of us have tried to help people relate to these stories as road maps to be followed, rather than picture postcards to be admired. And as people have followed the directions laid out in these stories, they have found themselves inevitably following the footsteps of Christ into the struggle for love and justice in our community.

I have developed some studies of the stories of Christ that have been helpful to groups I have worked with. While they are designed primarily for small groups, individuals can also use them.

Here are some simple guidelines to get the most out of these studies:

1. Begin with prayer.
2. Read the questions.
3. Trust the Spirit.
4. Listen to the answers.
5. Take your time.
6. Discourage any one person in the group from dominating.
7. Encourage people not to debate with each other but to understand one another.
8. Avoid side-tracks by suggesting that side issues be discussed over coffee later.
9. If there is difficulty, acknowledge it, but still try to answer the questions.
10. End with the exercise suggested.



1 / THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

REQUIREMENTS / Paper and pen

DISCUSSION /

1. What purpose do we believe God has for us? Write it down.
2. Read about the purpose Jesus believed the Spirit of God had for him.

Jesus came to Nazareth, the little town where he had been brought up, and went to the synagogue on the sabbath like he always did. An attendant asked him to share something from the Old Book. So he read the manifesto, written by a prophet called Isaiah, for the long-awaited leader. 'The Spirit of God has got hold of me, and is urging me to take on a special task; to share good news with the poor; free the prisoners; empower the disempowered; and smash the shackles of the oppressed.' Then Jesus closed the book, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. Well, you could have heard a pin drop. All the people stared at him. So he looked around at them all and said, 'Today this vision has become a reality. I have made this manifesto my own!'
Luke 4:20–21

3. Compare this sense of purpose with ours. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Why?
4. How do we think Jesus understood the Nazareth Manifesto? What kind of involvement with people did it mean for Jesus?
5. Who are the 'poor' in our world today?
6. What would be good news for these people?
7. Who are the 'prisoners' in our world?
8. How can we work for their release?
9. Who are the 'disempowered' in our world?
10. How can we empower them to live their lives more fully?
11. Who are the 'oppressed' in our society?
12. How can we break the shackles of the oppressed?
13. What is the source of the power for the struggle for justice?
14. How is the power of the Spirit different from other kinds of power?
15. How can we derive strength from the power of the Spirit?

ACTION /

Let's read what we wrote at the beginning of the study about our sense of purpose again. Then let's read what Jesus said in the Nazareth Manifesto about his sense of purpose again. Let's reconsider our understanding of our mission in the light of Christ's understanding of his mission. Let's open our hearts to the inspiration of the Spirit of God, and prayerfully re-write a manifesto for our own lives, in the light of the Nazareth Manifesto. Then let's share our manifesto with others. After sharing our manifestos with one another, let's spend a few minutes, over a cup of coffee, talking about the implications of these manifestos for the way we will live our lives, individually and collectively, from now on.

2 / THE PRINCIPLE OF JUSTICE

REQUIREMENTS / Paper and pen

DISCUSSION /

1. Define justice and draw a picture that illustrates our idea of justice.
2. Show the picture to the group and discuss your ideas of justice.
3. Read the parable of the sheep and the goats told by Jesus:

When the Human One comes, all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep—who have done right—on his right, and the goats—who haven't—on his left. Then the True Leader will say to those on his right, 'Come, join the party. For I was hungry and you gave me a feed. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I had just arrived in town and you took me into your home. My clothes were in tatters and you gave me your own outfit. I was sick in bed and you came and spent time with me. I was stuck in prison and you were there for me and my family.' Stunned, the people on the right will say to him, 'When on earth did we see you hungry and give you a feed, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we meet you after you had just arrived in town and give you a bed for the night? When were you sick in bed and we spent time with you? When were you stuck in prison and we were there for you and your family?' The True Leader will say, 'Whenever you did the right thing by those whom most consider least, you did the right thing by me!'

Then, turning to those on his left, the True Leader will say, 'Get out. You can go to hell with everyone else who has made life hell for others. I was hungry and you never gave me a feed; thirsty and you never gave me a drink; lonely, without a friend, and you walked by; half-naked and you didn't give me any clothes; sick in bed, and stuck in jail, and you didn't even visit.' And those who are left will be bewildered, and say, 'When did we see you hungry or thirsty? When did we see you without a friend or without clothes? When did we see you sick in bed or stuck in prison?' And the True Leader will say to them, 'Whenever you did not do the right thing by those whom most consider least, you did not do the right thing by me!'

Matthew 25:31-46

4. Both the 'sheep' and the 'goats' were surprised at the connection Jesus made between the way they had treated those whom most consider least and the True Leader. Why do you think that was so?
5. What are our reactions to Jesus' suggestion that, on Judgment Day, we will all be judged by the way we have treated the poor?
6. What is the principle by which we will all be judged?
7. Who are those that most consider least in our society?
8. How can we treat them so that we do them justice?
9. In what ways are we most likely not to do the right thing by those in the community that most consider least?

10. What excuses do we usually use to rationalise our failures?
11. What do we imagine God's response will be to our rationalisations?
12. How can we make sure we succeed more often than we fail in doing the right thing by those in the community that most consider least?

ACTION /

Let's spend some time thinking about a specific choice we are faced with at the moment. Who do we normally discount in making such a choice? How could we make this choice so as to do justice to those we usually don't take into account? Let's share some of our dilemmas with the group and discuss together how we might be able to resolve them.



3 / THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

REQUIREMENTS / Paper and pen, a candle, and a room that can be darkened

DISCUSSION /

1. Turn off the lights or darken the room and discuss the question: How does being in darkness make us feel?
2. Light a candle. How does it affect us when we are trapped in the darkness and someone lights a candle?
3. Read the following statement by Jesus:

You are the world's light. It is impossible to hide a town built on the top of a hill. Have you ever heard of anyone lighting a candle and putting it under the table? Don't you put it on a candlestick on the table so it gives light to the whole room? Well then, since you are the world's light, go ahead and shine so brightly that when people see the good things you do they'll thank God. Matthew 5:14–16

4. What is the 'darkness', in us, and around us?
5. Who does Jesus say are 'the light of the world'?
6. Why does Jesus insist we can be 'the light of the world'?
7. How does the idea of being the light of the world make us feel?
8. When we think of what we have to offer the world, what do we think would describe it best—a candle, a sixty-watt light bulb or a flood light? Why?
9. What would make us want to hide our 'light' under the table?
10. In his statement, Jesus says that our light is in the good things we do. Why did Jesus say that the light the world is reflected best, not in our good words, but in our good deeds?
11. Think of the good things others have done in our community. Which of these do we think effectively confronted the darkness and infused light into our community?
12. Think of one good thing we could do in our neighbourhood that would bring some light into the darkness.

ACTION /

Let's share with the group about the one good thing we would like to do. Think of the excuses we have used to 'hide our light' in the past, and talk about how we can overcome the temptation to do it again in the future. Then let's form a circle around the candle, and pray to God to help us make our light shine, rather than curse the darkness in our world.

4 / THE YEAST IN THE FLOUR

REQUIREMENTS / Paper and pen; flour, yeast, and water, and a bowl

DISCUSSION /

1. Have someone knead the flour, yeast, and water into dough.
2. Then put the dough in the bowl on one side to let it rise.
3. Read the following short statement:

Jesus told them another illustration: 'The movement of God is like yeast, which a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until the whole had risen.'
Matthew 13:33

4. Why did Jesus use this image to illustrate the way God's movement operates?
5. If we used this image as a model for the role of believers in their neighbourhood, who would we identify as the yeast and who would we identify as the flour? Why?
6. What does the 'yeast' have to offer to the 'flour'?
7. What can we offer to our neighbourhood?
8. What does the 'flour' have to offer the 'yeast'?
9. What can our neighbourhood offer to us?
10. How must the yeast and the flour be combined if the bread is to rise properly?
11. How can we, as believers, be as well integrated into our neighbourhood as that?
12. Why does Jesus insist that the significance of the yeast is seen, not in the difference between the yeast and the flour, but in the difference the yeast makes with the flour to the combined mixture?
13. What difference do we make to our community?
14. According to this illustration, what is the most effective way in which believers could make a difference in our neighbourhoods?

ACTION /

Let's think of one way we can become 'yeast' in our neighbourhoods. Let's decide how we can do it, then break into pairs, share our decision with our partner and make arrangements to contact each other within seven days to see how we are going with it.

5 / THE PEOPLE'S ORGANISATION

REQUIREMENTS / Paper and pen, a whiteboard and a whiteboard marker

DISCUSSION /

1. Draw a line down the middle of the whiteboard, and on the right-hand side have someone draw a normal organisational pyramid chart.
2. What do we notice about the organisational pyramid? Where are the bosses located? Where are the workers located? What is the relationship between the bosses and the workers? Why are the bosses on top and the workers on the bottom?
3. Read what Jesus has to say about 'bosses' and 'workers':

We all know bosses call the shots and heavies like to throw their weight around. But that's not the way you should do things. If you want to be a leader, don't act like a boss, let others call the shots; don't throw your weight around like a heavy, but do the hard work yourself. For the True Leader didn't come to be waited on hand and foot, but to be a worker, spending his life serving others, so that others could have a life worth living.

Matthew 20:25–28

4. What does Jesus say about organisations where bosses are on the top and workers are on the bottom?
5. What does Jesus suggest is a better form of organisation?
6. On the left hand side of the whiteboard have some people draw a chart of the organisation Jesus had in mind. Is it an inverted pyramid? A simple flat structure? A series of intersecting circles? Or something else?
7. What are the similarities and differences between the traditional and the alternative organisation?
8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional style?
9. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the alternative style?
10. What style of organisation would we prefer to work with? Why?
11. Why did Jesus insist on our being workers rather than bosses?

ACTION /

Let's get in a circle and spend some time answering two crucial questions. One: how can we act more like workers, and less like bosses, in our office, our church, our locality and our family? Two: what processes and structures can we set up to empower the disempowered paid and unpaid workers in our community groups? Then, let's talk over the answers we have to these questions, and make some plans to help each other develop some real people's organisations in our community.

6 / THE RADICAL AGENDA

REQUIREMENTS / Paper and pen, a table and some money in our pockets

DISCUSSION /

1. Read the following story that shows the 'radical agenda' Jesus set for people:

A man came up to Jesus and put it to him, 'Teacher, what do I need to do to be okay from here on out?' Jesus said, 'Why ask me? If you want to live life as you ought to, just obey the rules for living.' 'What rules?' the man enquired. Jesus replied, 'Don't murder. Don't screw around. Don't steal and don't lie. Look after the old folks and look out for your neighbour's interests like you'd look out for your own.' 'Gee, I've done all that,' the man replied. 'What more do I need to do?' Jesus replied, 'If you really want to get your act together, go and sell your property and give all the proceeds to the poor . . . and come follow me.' When the young man heard what Jesus said, he turned away in terrible distress because he had a lot of property and didn't want to part with it.

Then Jesus said to his followers, 'It is extremely difficult for the affluent to be a part of the movement. In fact, it's easier to get a fully loaded truck through the keyhole of a welfare apartment than it is to get a wealthy person to be a part of God's movement among the poor.' When the followers of Jesus heard this, they freaked out. 'Who of us can make it then?' 'Humanly speaking,' Jesus said, 'it is impossible. But with God anything is possible.' Peter said, 'We've left everything to follow you. What's in it for us?' Jesus reassured him, 'When the True Leader comes into his own, you will have an important part in the organisation. Everyone who has given up property or relationships for the sake of my cause will go through a tough time, but they will get more than enough to meet their needs. Just remember. Many who are first now will be last then, and many who are last now will be first then!'

Matthew 19:16–30

2. What was the man's question?
3. How would we have answered him?
4. When the man claimed to be good, Jesus did not counter his claim. Instead, he pointed out, he was not good enough. What was required of him to be really good?
5. Why do we imagine Jesus answered him this way? Why was it necessary for him to give his wealth to the poor for him to be really good?
6. Why do we think Jesus considered this rich young aristocrat was sinning by hanging on to his wealth? Was it that his money had become his god? Was he refusing to take action that could redress injustice? Was it both of these? Or something else again?
7. Do we consider that we are rich?
8. Riches are relative. How do we normally measure whether we are rich or not?
9. Compared to the poverty of the majority of the world's population, do we think Jesus could look at us as rich or poor? How does this make us feel?
10. Why do we think Jesus said it is humanly impossible for the rich to give up their wealth and share it with the poor?

11. Why do we think Jesus stuck to his guns over the radical demands of his agenda, instead of making it easier by demanding less?
12. In what ways do we try to moderate the radical demands that Jesus makes on us through this story?
13. If Jesus told us that for us to be really good we must follow this same radical agenda, how would we react?
14. How do we imagine that God might enable us to follow this radical agenda, if we were willing to?
15. What security did Jesus offer to those who risked everything to take his radical agenda seriously?
16. Do we know of anyone who has taken this radical agenda to heart? Let's share their story with the group.

ACTION /

Let's close our eyes and imagine Jesus standing in front of us, telling us to abandon our affluence and follow him. Let's ask God to help us to follow this command.

As a sign of our seriousness let's take all the money we have in our pockets and put it on the table. Let's then prayerfully choose one way that we can share our resources with those who need them more than us. Let's not tell everyone about what we intend to do, but let's tell at least one person, and report back to them when we have done what we have said we will do.

On the way out we can pick up the money we put on the table, and either give it to someone else to help them with their project, or keep it to spend on the project that we have got in mind.



7 / THE REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAMME

REQUIREMENTS / Paper and pen, a metal bowl and a box of matches

DISCUSSION /

1. Let's start by writing out our hate list—of people who hate us, and people we hate.
2. Then read the following 'revolutionary principles' Jesus spelled out to people:

Love those who hate you, and be kind to those who would like to kill you. Bless those who curse you and pray for the welfare of those who frustrate you. Even if they beat you up, embrace them. Even if they rip you off, help them out. If someone needs something, give it to them. Don't try to get back anything they take. Treat others just as you would like them to treat you.

Luke 6:27–31

3. What is the difference between the way we usually act and the way Jesus suggests we ought to act?
4. How do we feel about Jesus' programme? Why?
5. What difference do we think it would make to our world if people followed this programme? Why?
6. What human principle is the programme based on?
7. Do we think we treat this principle as a cliché or do we use it as a guideline for the way that we actually relate to others?
8. What are some common circumstances where we could put this programme into operation and what effect do we think it would have?
9. Read the following further revolutionary principles Jesus spelled out to people:

If you love those who love you—big deal! Everybody does that. If you do good to those who do good to you, where's the grace in that? Everybody acts that way already. If you give with the expectation of getting something back, you're just doing business as usual. Love those who hate you. Do good to those who are bad to you. Give yourself fully and freely without any expectations of getting anything back. Then you'll have something to be really pleased about. Your actions will reflect the character of God. Because God is kind to all, the grateful and the ungrateful, saint and sinner alike.

Luke 6:32–36

10. Why does Jesus dismiss our efforts to be nice as being of no real significance?
11. What does Jesus suggest will be the only way we can make a significant difference to our society?
12. What is the divine principle on which the programme is based?
13. Why is this principle so revolutionary?

ACTION /

Let's think of someone who is giving us a hard time. Let's pray for them, not cursing them, but blessing them. Then let's talk about how we can return good for the evil they do to us. And when we have finished, let's take our hate lists and burn them one by one in the metal bowl before we go.

8 / THE BLOODY STRUGGLE

REQUIREMENTS / Paper and pen, two or three pictures of modern martyrs, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero etc.)

DISCUSSION /

1. Read about 'the bloody struggle' to which Jesus calls us:

Do not imagine that I have come to bring tranquillity. I have not come to bring a gin and tonic, but a gun. For I have come to put people in conflict with each other—even in their own family. Anyone who cares more for their parents than they care for me and my cause, doesn't deserve to be a part of the movement. Anyone who cares more for their children than they care for me and my cause, doesn't deserve to be part of the movement. Anyone who wants to follow in my footsteps but is not willing to face the firing squad, is not good enough for me. Anyone who tries to preserve their life will waste it, but anyone who wastes their life for me and my movement will preserve the spirit that makes life worth living.

Matthew 10:34–39

2. What does the gun (or a 'sword' in the original) stand for?
3. How do we react to the statement that Jesus has not come to bring a gin and tonic but a gun?
4. What kind of conflict does Jesus say the struggle will involve?
5. How do we feel about such conflicts, even if they are for the sake of a good cause? Why?
6. Elsewhere Jesus says we must take care of our families, so what does he mean when he says that anyone who cares more for their parents or their children than they care for him or his cause doesn't deserve to be a part of the movement?
7. What does the firing squad ('crucifixion' in the original) stand for?
8. In the conflict Jesus envisaged, he talks about bringing a gun, not using a gun; facing a firing squad, not forming a firing squad; dying, not killing. What does this tell us about the conduct he expects from those involved in the struggle for love and justice?
9. Why can we expect that those who struggle for love and justice will face conflict and suffering?
10. What are some contemporary examples of those who have set aside security, safety and comfort to become involved in the bloody struggle for love and justice, and ultimately faced the 'firing squad'?
11. Place the pictures of the modern martyrs, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, and Oscar Romero on the table.
12. In what ways are they models for the way we should follow Jesus in the ongoing struggle?
13. Are we willing to join them in the ongoing struggle?
14. What may be the consequences if we do?
15. What are the consequences if we don't?

16. What do we think Jesus meant when he concluded by saying, 'Anyone who tries to preserve their life will waste it, but anyone who wastes their life for me and my movement will preserve the spirit that makes life worth living'?

ACTION /

Let's think of an issue of love and justice, where, if we stood up and were counted, conflict would be created. Let's share this with the rest of the group and then allow the group to pray for us, asking God to give us the courage to face that anticipated conflict. Maybe the issue we want to take a stand on provokes a strong reaction from other people in our group. If so, let's take time to talk with one another, listen to one another's views, and pray that God will give us all wisdom and strength for the struggle.

Over coffee, let's discuss how, as a group, we may be able to stand with each other and encourage each other to work for love and justice in the face of a possible violent backlash.

9 / THE MUSTARD SEED CONSPIRACY

REQUIREMENTS / Paper and pen, a packet of mustard seeds

DISCUSSION /

1. What do we think we can achieve in terms of real change in society?
2. How do we feel when we are so small compared to the big forces that we are up against?
3. Read the following short statements about the mustard seed conspiracy:

The mustard seed is the smallest seed of them all, yet when it grows it is the biggest tree in the garden. Its branches become a haven for wild birds to build their nests.

Matthew 13:31

4. Pass around the packet of mustard seeds, making sure everyone gets a seed.
5. Why do we think Jesus uses a tiny seed to symbolise our efforts?
6. Why doesn't Jesus consider small efforts insignificant?
7. What reasons do we have for believing that the smallest effort might in the long run be of the greatest significance?
8. How can we encourage one another to live as if the smallest efforts can be of the greatest significance?
9. What examples do we know of people whose efforts appeared to have very little significance, yet in the end turned out to be of great significance to society?
10. What does the picture of a tiny seed becoming a tree where wild birds build their nests, convey to us?
11. How can we use this imagery of trees and nests to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts?
12. What has to happen to the seed before it becomes a tree?

ACTION /

Let's think of one way we can bury ourselves in the lives of the community. Let's share our decision with someone else. Then, let's take a mustard seed in our hand and pray that our 'mustard seed' effort may blossom into a 'tree of refuge' for those in trouble.

