

SESSION 1: Satisfaction

Gratitude changes everything

The power of gratitude

Martin Seligman (psychologist, author, TEDtalk speaker) discovered that if every day we write down 3 things we are thankful for, after 21 days we will rewire our brains to scan for the positives – in fact we're 7 times more likely to notice the positives. After 42 days, our levels of depression and anxiety will decrease and our levels of wellbeing will increase.^a

Q. What 3 things are you thankful for right now?

Q. How do you feel about undertaking a 21-day challenge to help cultivate a habit of gratitude?

Jesus and gratitude

Gratitude can be pretty powerful. What does Jesus offer when it comes to the "big 5" in life: finding satisfaction, meaning, identity, hope and freedom? And what would it mean to be thankful for these things?

John 4:4-18,27-30, 39-42 [New International Version]

⁴ Now he [Jesus] had to go through Samaria^b. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan^c woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "**Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**"

^a "Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions", Martin E. P. Seligman et al, in *American Psychologist*, July-August 2005.

^b The region of Samaria is in modern day central Israel.

^c The Samaritans had Jewish and foreign ancestors and so were considered by the Jews as "racial half-breeds whose religion was tainted by various unacceptable elements". D A Carson, *The Gospel According to John, Apollos*, 1991, p216.

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." ...

...²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah^d?" ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions would you like to ask Jesus?

Jesus and "living water"

Jesus, tired from his journey, asks for a drink at a well. The person he asks is surprised on two counts. Firstly, she is a woman and they are alone, and the culture of the day would have prohibited her conversing with a man who wasn't her relative. Secondly, she is a Samaritan, and Jews did not associate (have dealings) with Samaritans. Jesus is breaking social and religious taboos by speaking with her.

The conversation quickly moves to another kind of water. Jesus says to the woman: **"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** What is this *living* water? What we can determine from this conversation is:

- a) It has something to do with the "spiritual" side of life ("eternal life")
- b) It is something that Jesus thinks we need (hence the offer)
- c) To possess it will give satisfaction that is deep ("will never thirst") and lasting ("welling up into eternal life")
- d) It is available to everyone ("whoever")
- e) It transforms this life ("water I give them...will become in them a spring of water")
- f) One must come to Jesus for it ("water I give them")

^d "Messiah" in the Hebrew language is translated as "Christ" in Greek, and is translated to "anointed king" in English.

Jesus is talking about the gift of eternal life. It can be received now and continues on beyond the grave. It is all that is needed. The moments of satisfaction this gift provides in life now are a glimpse of the deep and lasting experience that lies ahead.

The woman asks for this *living water* but we don't know how much she understands or how serious she is at this point. Jesus then goes on to reveal details of her private life (about her husbands (plural)). This shows the woman that the man she is talking to is no ordinary man. Now she is seriously engaged in the conversation! The conversation continues and Jesus gets an upgrade to *Messiah*.

The details about the woman's private life help us, as the reader, to see that this woman is in need of *living water*. In a culture and time when women needed husbands to be secure, the fact that she has had five suggests her life has been precarious. Jesus is talking about deep and lasting satisfaction, and it is unlikely the woman has known this from her relationships.

The encounter this woman has with Jesus changes her – but also the lives of her townspeople. They all end up declaring that Jesus is the *Messiah* and the one who will save them.

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions do you still have?

Gratitude is everything

Q. Can you think of a time in your life when you felt a sense of satisfaction?

(Achievements, opportunities, relationships...)

Q. What have you noticed when it comes to finding satisfaction in life?

Jesus is offering the gift of eternal life. To experience a deeper and lasting satisfaction unlike what we experience in this life.

Those who take up this offer are freed from the endless pursuit of seeking satisfaction in this life. Life can bring more joy when it is freed from this burden.

Jesus isn't saying his followers will never feel dissatisfied at times. But with the gift of eternal life, they have all that they need. In the future there will be deep and lasting satisfaction, and that can give perspective on the present.

Q. Jesus is offering deep and lasting satisfaction. What questions would you need answered before you could say: "I'm grateful for this offer"?

SESSION 2: Meaning

Gratitude changes everything

The power of gratitude

Martin Seligman (psychologist, author, TEDtalk speaker) discovered that if every day we write down 3 things we are thankful for, after 21 days we will rewire our brains to scan for the positives – in fact we're 7 times more likely to notice the positives. After 42 days, our levels of depression and anxiety will decrease and our levels of wellbeing will increase.^a

Q. What 3 things are you thankful for right now?

Q. How are you going with your 21-day challenge to help cultivate a habit of gratitude?

Jesus and gratitude

Gratitude can be pretty powerful. What does Jesus offer when it comes to the “big 5” in life: finding satisfaction, meaning, identity, hope and freedom? And what would it mean to be thankful for these things?

John 6:1-13, 24-40[New International Version]

6 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick.³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival^b was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up,⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

^a “Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions”, Martin E. P. Seligman et al, in *American Psychologist*, July–August 2005.

^b The Passover festival was a celebration of the Exodus event that occurred 1300 years previously. At that time, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and were released after 10 plagues that beset the Egyptians. In the last plague, the angel “passed over” the Israelite houses and spared their firstborn. The Israelites were spared because of the blood of the “Passover lamb” on their door (Exodus 12).

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi^c, when did you get here?”

²⁶ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ **Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man^d will give you.** For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

³⁰ So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’^e”

³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ **For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.**”

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions would you like to ask Jesus?

Jesus and working for “food that endures”

Jesus has just miraculously fed at least five thousand people from a small boy’s lunchbox. Jesus’ actions are reminiscent of what God did when he provided “manna from heaven” for the Israelites during the time of the Exodus journey from Egypt. By deliberately doing what

^c Or “teacher”.

^d The “Son of Man” was an expression Jesus used to refer to himself.

^e The “bread from heaven” called “manna” (which means: “what is it?”) incident occurred 1300 years earlier on the Exodus journey from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan (Israel). The Israelites were starving (and grumbling!) and so God rained down bread from heaven to feed them. The manna was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey (Exodus 16).

God had done, Jesus is giving a sign as to his true identity as the Son of God. The amount of food left over is an indication of the generous nature of Jesus/God.

The crowd who witnessed the miraculous feeding continue to pursue Jesus. Jesus knows their motivations for doing so. They are after another meal, as they wouldn't have eaten since Jesus last fed them.

In saying: "**Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you**" Jesus is saying they are setting their sights too low. What he can give them is better than bread that can go mouldy. He can give them bread that lasts into eternity.

The crowd wants to know how they can get this bread – what they must *do* to obtain it. Jesus responds by saying they must *believe* in him. The crowd then says to believe in him, they require proof. They need another "manna from heaven" incident. The previous miraculous feeding wasn't enough.

Jesus picks up on the "manna from heaven" theme to say that he himself is this life-giving bread from God. This life-giving bread is absolutely satisfying.

Jesus will honour what God the Father has asked him to do. .⁴⁰ **For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.**" Those who believe in Jesus are tied to something greater than themselves. They are tied to the one who can raise them up to eternal life.

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions do you still have?

Gratitude is everything

It is said that to have meaning in life, we need a *purpose* for living and *significance* that comes from serving some good beyond ourselves^f. In secular western culture, we create our own meaning: family, political cause, career or accomplishments. To have a meaningful life, therefore, life must go well.

Q. Can you think of a time when you felt your life had meaning?

Q. What have you noticed when it comes to finding meaning in life?

Jesus is offering the gift of eternal life. Those who take up the offer will also find they have a meaningful life now because:

- Their lives become tied up with something (someone!) greater than themselves.
- Hardships in life take on a new perspective (suffering can enhance rather than sabotage meaning because it is the way to get closer to Jesus.)

^f Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God*; Hodder & Stoughton, 2016; p 58.

Q. Jesus is offering a meaningful life. What questions would you need answered before you could say: "I'm grateful for this offer"?

SESSION 3: Identity

Gratitude changes everything

The power of gratitude

Martin Seligman (psychologist, author, TEDtalk speaker) discovered that if every day we write down 3 things we are thankful for, after 21 days we will rewire our brains to scan for the positives – in fact we're 7 times more likely to notice the positives. After 42 days, our levels of depression and anxiety will decrease and our levels of wellbeing will increase.^a

Q. What 3 things are you thankful for right now?

Q. How are you going with your 21-day challenge to help cultivate a habit of gratitude?

Jesus and gratitude

Gratitude can be pretty powerful. What does Jesus offer when it comes to the “big 5” in life: finding satisfaction, meaning, identity, hope and freedom? And what would it mean to be thankful for these things?

John 10:1-21 [New International Version]

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees^b, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

*⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved^c. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; **I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.***

*¹¹ **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and*

^a “Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions”, Martin E. P. Seligman et al, in *American Psychologist*, July–August 2005.

^b In Jesus’ day, these were Israel’s religious elite known for their zealous adherence to religious laws.

^c Or “kept safe”.

scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

¹⁹ The Jews who heard these words were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

²¹ But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions would you like to ask Jesus?

Jesus and identity

Jesus is using sheep and shepherds as a figure of speech. It's not random – in the Old Testament God's people were described as sheep and the leaders as shepherds. In one influential passage, the leaders were blasted for caring for themselves at the expense of the flock. It was predicted that one day God would come, end the bad leadership and be the good shepherd^d.

To our modern ears, being likened to unintelligent animals like sheep sounds insulting. However the image probably has more to do with a sense of dependency. Sheep in those days needed good shepherds in order to survive and thrive.

Jesus starts by addressing the Pharisees. He says their leadership is illegitimate (they haven't entered the right way) and ineffective (the sheep aren't listening). The Pharisees don't understand what Jesus was telling them, presumably because it's not what they want to hear. So Jesus elaborates by contrasting his own leadership style with theirs.

Firstly, Jesus says he is the gate. He is the legitimate leader. Enter through him and the sheep find safety and good pasture. Jesus says: **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"**. A "full life" is a life with the shepherd, and finding satisfaction and enjoyment in the shepherd's bounty. Contrast this with leaders who are more like thieves, fleecing the flock for personal gain and destroying it in the process.

Secondly, Jesus says he is the good shepherd. **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** A good shepherd knows the value of the flock and will protect it all costs. By contrast, leaders who are like hired hands will run away

^d Ezekiel 34.

at the first sight of trouble because they care about themselves and not those who follow them.

Jesus then expands briefly on two points. Firstly, he knows his people intimately (“I know my sheep and my sheep know me”). Secondly, he can defeat death (“lay down my life – only to take it up again”). Jesus is the kind of leader who has the willingness and power to really take care of his flock.

Jesus’ comments are divisive. Some want to say they are the ramblings of a mad man – and yet this “madman” has the power to perform miracles, such as restoring sight.

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions do you still have?

Gratitude is everything

“Identity” is an abstract word. They say it is comprised of two aspects: what is true of you in every setting (a durable sense of self) and an assessment of your own value (sense of worth)^e. Our secular Western individualism says be who you want to be and it doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks. Discover your deepest dreams and desires and express them. Create your own identity. But if our identity is based on our own individual desires, then they change all the time. Plus it’s impossible for us to convince ourselves of our own self worth – because we are social beings and it does matter what other people think. And if our identity is self-made then it is fragile.

Q. Can you think of a time when you felt a sense of worth?

Q. What have you noticed when it comes to finding a sense of worth in life?

Jesus is offering us identity – of becoming one of his sheep. Ironically for those who take up the offer of joining the herd, they gain what our secular Western individualism has always been after. They know they are valuable, because someone outside of themselves is telling them that. And life is good when the shepherd is in the picture.

Q. Jesus is offering us identity. What questions would you need answered before you could say: “I’m grateful for this offer”?

^e Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God*; Hodder & Stoughton, 2016; p 118.

SESSION 4: Hope

Gratitude changes everything

The power of gratitude

Martin Seligman (psychologist, author, TEDtalk speaker) discovered that if every day we write down 3 things we are thankful for, after 21 days we will rewire our brains to scan for the positives – in fact we're 7 times more likely to notice the positives. After 42 days, our levels of depression and anxiety will decrease and our levels of wellbeing will increase.^a

Q. What 3 things are you thankful for right now?

Jesus and gratitude

Gratitude can be pretty powerful. What does Jesus offer when it comes to the “big 5” in life: finding satisfaction, meaning, identity, hope and freedom? And what would it mean to be thankful for these things?

John 11:1, 5-7, 11-13, 20-30, 32-44 [New International Version]

¹Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha... ⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷and then he said to his disciples, ...¹¹Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” ¹²His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” ¹³Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” ²³Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” ²⁵Jesus said to her, **“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”** ²⁷“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

²⁸After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him....

³²When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³When Jesus saw her

^a “Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions”, Martin E. P. Seligman et al, in *American Psychologist*, July–August 2005.

weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved^b in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days^c." ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions would you like to ask Jesus?

Jesus and hope in the face of death

Jesus hears that his friend Lazarus is seriously ill. He waits two days before leaving to go to him. By then, Lazarus is dead. Jesus delays not because he is unwilling or unable to do something. The reader is told that Jesus loves Martha, Mary and Lazarus and will wake Lazarus up. The delay is rather to give Jesus the opportunity to reveal the character and nature of God (the "glory of God").

Notice that no one is expecting Jesus to raise Lazarus. Mary and Martha believe in "resurrection life" – but this is something that God would do at the end of time. They don't believe that Jesus can do it, now. "If you had been here, my brother would not have died". Both sisters say the same thing to underscore the point – no one is expecting Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead. They just think that if Jesus had got there sooner, he could have healed Lazarus and thereby prevented him from dying. What Jesus goes on to do defies their expectations.

Jesus says to Martha: "**I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die**". Jesus is talking about eternal life that can be possessed now and which persists after physical death and can never be lost (die). The way to access it is by believing in Jesus as the one who is willing and able to provide it.

^b In the original Greek language this suggests "anger, outrage and emotional indignation", *D A Carson, The Gospel According to John, Apollos, 1991, p415.*

^c If Jesus set out for Bethany upon hearing Lazarus was dead ("asleep") then the trip took four days. So even if he had set out when he first heard Lazarus was ill, Lazarus would have been dead two days by the time Jesus got there. So Jesus' delay didn't cause Lazarus' death.

Why does Jesus weep if he knows he can raise Lazarus from the dead? It must be because he is grieved and angry about what death does to those he loves. In resuscitating Lazarus (who will physically die again) Jesus shows he is willing and able to resurrect to life eternal (where they will never die). Lazarus' resuscitation is a forerunner to the ultimate sign that Jesus can resurrect to life eternal – when he himself is resurrected.

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions do you still have?

Gratitude is everything

It is said that the great challenge to human hope is the question of where *we* are going^d. Secular western culture is all about this life and says death is natural and there is nothing to fear. And yet, death is what strips us of everything we value in life and introduces a gnawing uncertainty: what is beyond it?

Q. Can you think of a time when you wondered where your life was going?

Q. What have you noticed when it comes to finding hope in life?

Jesus is offering the gift of eternal life. For those who take up his offer, and follow him:

- They now have a hope for the future that transcends death.
- While there will be grief and uncertainty with parting from this world, death is not the end but the beginning.
- Hope for the future helps when even our brightest moments in life become painful, when they are lost all too soon.

Q. Jesus is offering us hope that not even death can take away. What questions would you need answered before you could say: "I'm grateful for this offer"?

^d Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God*; Hodder & Stoughton, 2016; p 159

SESSION 5: Freedom

Gratitude changes everything

The power of gratitude

Martin Seligman (psychologist, author, TEDtalk speaker) discovered that if every day we write down 3 things we are thankful for, after 21 days we will rewire our brains to scan for the positives – in fact we're 7 times more likely to notice the positives. After 42 days, our levels of depression and anxiety will decrease and our levels of wellbeing will increase.^a

Q. What 3 things are you thankful for right now?

Jesus and gratitude

Gratitude can be pretty powerful. What does Jesus offer when it comes to the “big 5” in life: finding satisfaction, meaning, identity, hope and freedom? And what would it mean to be thankful for these things?

John 1:29, 13:1-17 [New International Version]

²⁹ *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin^b of the world!*

¹³ *It was just before the Passover Festival^c. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

² *The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him^d.*

⁶ *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”*

⁷ *Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”*

⁸ *“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”*

^a “Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions”, Martin E. P. Seligman et al, in *American Psychologist*, July–August 2005.

^b There are many ways the Bible describes “sin”. Three of the most popular ways include: breaking God’s law, being defiled/unacceptable by falling short, or the breaking of relationships with God and each other. Sam Chan, *Evangelism in a Sceptical World*, Zondervan, 2018, p77.

^c The Passover festival was a celebration of the Exodus event that occurred 1300 years previously. At that time, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and were released after 10 plagues that beset the Egyptians. In the last plague, the angel “passed over” the Israelite houses and spared their firstborn. The Israelites were spared because of the blood of the “Passover lamb” on their door (Exodus 12).

^d In the culture of the time, the washing of feet was a sign of welcome and hospitality. The task was usually left to those low in the social order: non-Jewish servants or women.

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place.

"Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ **Now that I, your Lord and Teacher,**

have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is

greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed^e if you do them.

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions would you like to ask Jesus?

Jesus and freedom in service

The time Jesus chooses to wash his disciple's feet is very significant. It was just before the Passover. Part of the Passover celebrations involved the Passover meal, where a lamb was traditionally sacrificed and eaten. Jesus knows the time of the Passover is the "hour" for him to leave the world. He is the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. He will do this via execution on a cross, sacrificed so that others might know freedom from guilt, uncleanness and shame. This sacrifice is the act of love that Jesus will see through to the end.

The washing of feet was a menial task. And yet here Jesus - who has the power of the universe under his own feet - sets that aside and serves his disciples in the lowliest of ways. Peter's initial resistance is hardly surprising. The greatest person in the room does not wash feet! Jesus however is insistent - to follow him is to be served by him. "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me". Jesus has moved beyond a mere physical foot washing here. He's saying that if he doesn't clean someone then they have no future with him.

Peter doesn't want to miss out and so offers his hands and head to be washed as well. Jesus' reply is enigmatic: "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you". Jesus can make someone clean and acceptable before God. But not everybody has responded to Jesus in this way. Judas is "unclean" because, prompted by the devil, he intends to betray Jesus.

Jesus then says: "**Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I**

^e To be blessed by God is to enjoy God's favour.

have done for you". Jesus is giving his followers a mandate. To follow him is a life of service. But in serving others, they have been served first in an even greater way by Jesus.

Q. What interests you here?

Q. What questions do you still have?

Gratitude is everything

Secular Western culture champions freedom. It's often talked of in the negative: in terms of freedom from constraint. But how free are we really? Anything we really value in life or think is worth pursuing will put constraints on us. And is this always a bad thing? In relationships there is difference when we know the other party is giving up some of their freedom for us. That it is not all one-way. Our sacrifice of freedom feels less like "service" when we know we too are being served.

Q. Can you think of a time when you felt free?

Q. What have you noticed when it comes to finding freedom in life?

Jesus is offering us freedom. For those who take up his offer, and follow him:

- They are cleansed and acceptable to God, freed from guilt, uncleanness and shame.
- They enter a lifetime of service of God and others.
- Ironically this doesn't feel like a sacrifice of freedom because they have been served in a much greater way by the one they follow.

Q. Jesus is offering us freedom. What questions would you need answered before you could say: "I'm grateful for this offer"?