

## SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE STUDIES

- 1) Make sure that each person has a copy of the study booklet you are using. People have hearing problems and no-one concentrates all the time, so they need a written copy of the questions to take part in the discussions.
- 2) Copies of the studies can be bought from the MU Office for each person, or you may wish to buy one copy and use your church facilities to photocopy the number you need.
- 3) If possible, it is good to hand out the studies a week or so before the day, so people have time to prepare in advance. If you do this, it's wise to have some extra copies available on the day in case some forget to bring theirs, or extra people join you.
- 4) It is essential that the leader has fully prepared the study beforehand. You will find that the summary is relevant to the answers of the questions.
- 5) You may need to choose a selection of questions to discuss if your group has limited time available for discussion. Choose your selection beforehand, don't simply end when you run out of time.
- 6) Don't waste time reading every Bible passage aloud. The references are included in the booklets so the participants can read them for themselves. Allow time for this where necessary.
- 7) It is generally better for discussion to sit in a semi-circle than to sit in rows. It's hard to talk to the back of someone's head, and it's generally easier to hear when sitting in semicircles.
- 8) If you have a large group (20 or more), consider breaking into smaller groups of about 10 for the discussion time. The person leading the study could do an introduction, small groups could then discuss the questions with an assigned leader for each group (who has prepared beforehand), and then all could rejoin for a conclusion time directed by the leader.
- 9) All Bible readings are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of International Bible Society.

Produced and Printed by MU Sydney Inc.  
St Andrew's House  
Sydney 2000  
Phone/Fax (02) 9267 8372  
© W Mayer 2000

# Bruised Reeds and Broken Vessels



**MU Sydney**

presents

**Bible Study Program 2001**

**A series of 4 Bible Studies**

**Exploring the unlikely people God chooses as  
His servants**

**Written by Wendy Mayer**

## Introduction

*'A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.'*  
Isaiah 42v3

Our society places great importance on finding the right person for the job. We have a whole industry built around presenting people in the best possible light, and finding the most appropriate and qualified person for the task. We teach people how to interview and how to be interviewed.

God's way of doing things is often very different to our way. When Samuel, the prophet, is instructed by God to anoint one of Jesse's sons as Israel's new king, he looks for the things the people will want in a king: pleasing appearance, tall stature, someone who looks like a king. But God makes it clear that He uses different criteria:

*'Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'*  
1 Samuel 16v7

Time and time again, God chooses the unlikely person, the one we wouldn't have picked, the one who has already failed, to carry out His plan.

God's choices are not always our choices. We don't have to be the best, the most qualified or talented to do God's will and be part of His plan. It is Jacob, the deceiver, who gives his name to the nation of Israel, not his son Joseph, who trusted God in every difficulty and appears far more worthy. Mary Magdalene, the first person to see Jesus after His resurrection, is someone who was formerly demon possessed and, even worse than that, she's a woman and therefore unacceptable as a witness to the society of the day - but not to God.

God doesn't see bruising and brokenness as a sign of shame. To him it is precious because Jesus *"was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."* Isaiah 53 v 5. Our salvation came at the cost of Jesus being both bruised and broken.

As we consider some of the people God has used to extend His kingdom, let us take fresh hope in remembering that, unlike our society, God doesn't discard us when we fail. He often teaches us more through our failures than through our successes.

*"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* Psalm 51 v 17

Study 1	Moses
Study 2	Gideon
Study 3	Ruth
Study 4	Peter

## SUGGESTED HYMNS AND SONGS

**Theme:** Lord for the Years Ring of Praise 56  
God moves in a Mysterious way AHB 54

### Study 1 Moses

*Australian Hymn Book (AHB)*

- 30 Through all the changing scenes
  - 144 Ye Servants of God
  - 478 Guide me O thou Great Jehovah
- Ring of Praise*
- 98 The Steadfast love of the Lord
  - 124 Through our God we shall do  
valiantly
  - 134 Hail to the Lord's Anointed
  - 216 Brother let me be your Servant

### Study 2 Gideon

*AHB*

- 16 The Lord's my Shepherd
  - 46 O God our Help in ages past
  - 165 What a friend we have in Jesus
- Ring of Praise*
- 61 Shine Jesus Shine
  - 64 Search me O God
  - 132 Come, see the beauty of the Lord
  - 191 Rejoice, rejoice

### Study 3 Ruth

*AHB*

- 10 All people that on earth do dwell
  - 13 Let all the world in every corner  
sing
  - 514 O Jesus I have promised
- Ring of Praise*
- 50 Father I thank you
  - 76 Behold what manner of Love
  - 111 This is Love
  - 183 Father welcomes all His children

### Study 4 Peter

*AHB*

- 48 Be Still my Soul
  - 320 Breath on me Breath of God
  - 519 Dear Lord and Father of  
Mankind
- Ring of Praise*
- 65 Change my Heart O God
  - 147 The Price is Paid
  - 160 Amazing Love
  - 218 Freely, Freely

# Bruised Reeds and Broken Vessels

## MU Sydney Bible Studies 2001



God's answer should be sufficient for Moses, 'I will be with you', but Moses continued to ask for further confirmation. 'What if the Israelites ask for your name?' 'What if they don't believe you've sent me?', 'I'm no good with words. I won't know what to say' and finally 'Please send someone else.' God patiently answered each of Moses' objections, giving him a name to quote and a series of miraculous signs to verify his claim to be speaking God's words. God promised He would give Moses the words to say, but when Moses finally refused to obey God's call, he experienced God's anger.

God will deal with us in the same way today. He promises to be with us, He gives us the strength we need and the words to communicate His message to others and He will listen patiently to every doubt and fear we bring to Him. But if we refuse to be the witnesses He has commanded us to be, we will also experience His anger. Is there anywhere that you are asking God to send someone else instead of you? What are the main responsibilities that God has given you? Are you using His strength to carry them out or are you trying to do them in your own way and your own time?

We all make mistakes from time-to-time and often our society will try and discard those who have failed in the past. God doesn't discard us when we fail, He uses our failures to teach us to stay closer to Him so that we grow stronger in our faith and our ability to let Him direct us in the way He wants us to go. Unlike the world, God often gives us a second, and if necessary a third and fourth chance to carry out His will for us, although we mustn't presume on His patience, because there are times when our failure to obey means we miss an opportunity and a blessing. What He requires of us is that we believe His assurance that He will be with us and give us all we need to complete the work.

Where do you need a second chance from God? It's hard to be confident when we have already failed in the past, but nothing is too hard for God, even overcoming our failure. Remember God's words to Zechariah  
*'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit' says the Lord Almighty.*  
(Zechariah 4v6)

Produced and Printed by MU Sydney Inc.  
St Andrew's House  
Sydney 2000  
Phone/Fax (02) 9267 8372  
© W Mayer 2000

### Study 1

### MOSES

#### A False start and a Second Chance

At first glance Moses appears to be exactly the right man for the job that needs to be done. Over 200 years before Moses, God used the situation of Joseph's position in Egypt to bring His people to a safe place where they could develop and multiply away from the corrupting influence of the idol worshipping Canaanite people. For a long time the Egyptians left the Israelites alone, but a new king came to the throne of Egypt and, alarmed at the number of 'foreigners' in his midst, he firstly enslaved and then tried to reduce their number by killing the infant boys.

It was time for the Israelites to leave Egypt, they were now the 'great nation' that God had promised Abraham they would become in Genesis 12 v 2, and they needed to return to their own God-given land. God was already preparing the leader of His choice to bring this about, but first He needed to train him to depend on God, and not on his own abilities, position or supposed worldly advantages. Moses looked like the right person, but he started in the wrong way, and the Israelites rejected him. God needed to train Moses and to bring the Israelites to the point where they would accept Moses as their leader.

God's time is often not our time, and sometimes, like Moses, we make a false start by attempting the right thing at the wrong time. We may even try to bring about a good result using a 'shortcut' which involves methods we know God wouldn't approve. Wrong methods bring us consequences we have to suffer, but God doesn't give up on us. In His time, God gives us second and third chances and He also gives us the strength to complete the work He has called us to do.

**Exodus 1v 8** Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. 9 "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. 10 Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become

*Note: You may need to choose a selection of questions to discuss if your group has limited time*

even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country."

11 So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites 13 and worked them ruthlessly. 14 They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 16 "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live."

17 The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.

18 Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?"

19 The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive."

20 So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

22 Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

2:1 Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, 2 and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. 3 But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. 4 His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

5 Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. 6 She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. 7 Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

8 "Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother.

9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him.

10 When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

11 One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.

12 Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?"

14 The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must

## MOSES

### A False start and a Second Chance

**When we first look at Moses he doesn't appear to be either bruised or broken. He had all the advantages of a privileged background, having grown up in the household of Pharaoh's daughter. This situation arose because Pharaoh became concerned about the number of Israelites living in Egypt. He firstly enslaved them and then tried to reduce their numbers by having their baby boys killed at birth. But Pharaoh's plans were stopped by a series of women. The Hebrew midwives let the boys live, Moses' mother kept him safe until he was too big to hide, his sister watched over him at the river bank and Pharaoh's own daughter felt sorry for him and adopted him as her son. God used the socially powerless women to frustrate the efforts of the country's most powerful man.**

**As an adult Moses studied the Israelites and planned to use his unique upbringing to help them. Acts 7v25 tells us that he '*thought his people would realise that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.*' He tried his own method of helping out by killing an Egyptian who was mistreating an Israelite and hiding the body. To his surprise he found that the Israelites didn't want his help and the Egyptian Pharaoh wanted to kill him when he learnt what Moses had done.**

**Moses escaped to Midian and probably thought that he had left his old life behind, never to return, but God used the time to prepare the Israelites to leave Egypt and to accept Moses as their leader. God used his years in the desert to train him for the years he would lead the Israelites in their desert wanderings.**

**When God was ready, He called Moses to the job He had been training him for, in a way that caught Moses' attention. Moses saw a bush on fire which didn't burn up and when he went to investigate, he heard God's voice calling him. As He spoke to Moses, God showed that He is not remote from His people, He has seen their misery and heard their cries and He is going to act to rescue them and bring them to their own land. He revealed to Moses that his part will be much greater than just relieving the suffering of a few individual Israelites, Moses is to go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt.**

**Forty years previously, Moses had acted with confidence to right a situation he saw as wrong. Now he showed none of his former confidence. He protests that he has no status or position to enable him to achieve this. He is no-one, an outsider who is no longer a member of the royal family. Why would God choose him now?**

16 He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. 17 But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it."

18 Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive." Jethro said, "Go, and I wish you well."

19 Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead."

20 So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.

**12a) What was Moses' first excuse to God, and what was God's reply?**

**b) God responds to each of Moses' objections. What does Moses say that causes God's anger to burn?( v 13 )**

**c) Is there anything you might be saying to God that could make His anger burn, eg an excuse or a criticism?**

**13a) What help had God already prepared for Moses? (v14)**

**b) Can you share a second chance God gave you, or someone you know?**

There are times in our lives when we feel totally prepared to do a particular task, only to have it taken away from us. There are other times when we feel out of touch, unprepared and ill-equipped and we find the job placed squarely in our laps. Why?

When we feel a task is within our abilities, we can be tempted to rely on ourselves and not on God. When we feel a task is beyond us, we are forced to depend on God and we can be sure He will give us all we need to carry it out. He is prepared to listen to our concerns and worries, just as long as we don't take the step into disobedience and say 'no, send someone else.'

Remember Zechariah 4v6 '*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit' says the Lord Almighty.*

have become known."

15 When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.

**1a) When the Egyptian king decided to kill the Israelite baby boys, who were the people who prevented this happening?  
(See Exodus 1:17-20; 2:2,3; 2:5,6 & 2:7,8)**

**b) What do these people all have in common?**

**2a) In what two environments did Moses spend his growing years?  
How would this prepare him as a leader of the Israelites?**

**b) How have you seen God prepare you or someone you know for future work for Him?**

**3) As an adult, what attempt did he make to help his people?**

**4a) How did the Israelites show that they were not prepared to accept help from Moses?**

**b) What were the consequences of this attempt on Moses ?**

Moses spent the next 40 years working as a shepherd in the land of Midian. He married and had two sons, and probably expected to spend the rest of his life there. But God hadn't discarded him because he had made a mistake. God was using this time to prepare Moses to lead and to prepare the Israelites for Moses' leadership.

**Exodus 2 v 23** During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.

24 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. 25 So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

**5) While Moses was in the land of Midian what was happening to the Israelites in Egypt?**

**Exodus 3v1** Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight--why the bush does not burn up." 4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." 5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. 7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey--the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." 13 Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

**6) What sign did God provide for Moses to prepare him to believe the message God had for him?**

**7) What was Moses initial reaction in verse 6, and what does that show Moses believed about the voice?**

**8a) Forty years earlier, Moses had tried to protect one Israelite from Egyptian oppression, what job did God have for him to do now?**

**b) (to consider, not necessarily to share)**

Is there anywhere that you are trying to do things your way, rather than God's way?

**9) Remembering that God never allows the end to justify the means, what sort of things would tell us that we are not acting the way God wants us to?**

**10) What change seems to have come over Moses since he left Egypt? (See 3v11)**

**11a) How does God reply to Moses, and how can we take encouragement from this when we are facing difficulties?**

**b) Can you share a situation in which you knew God was with you?**

**Moses may have started out being confident in his ability to help the Israelites (see Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 v 25), but his confidence has now disappeared. The people he once knew in the Egyptian court have died, and he is out of touch with both Israelites and Egyptians. In Exodus 4 he continues to bring his doubts to God, asking God what he can do if the Israelites don't believe that he has returned on God's orders. God gives him three miraculous signs to verify his claim, but Moses continues his objections with words that find an echo in many of our minds:**

**Exodus 4 v10** Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

11 The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

13 But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

14 Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. 15 You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do."

who think that every doubt must be removed before they can be used by God, he took his doubts to God and asked for a confirmation that he could believe came from God. God is prepared to help us overcome our doubts, but we need to bring them to Him. Do I have any doubts I'm holding onto as an excuse, so I don't have to do the work God is placing before me?

When God gave Gideon the confirmation he asked for, Gideon obeyed God's call, even when God's ways seemed impossible—facing 120,000 men with a force of 300. God showed all Israel that the victory came from Him and not from their skill as warriors. It is the same for us. Our work that lasts for eternity is the work God gives us to do, and we can only do it in His strength, His way and His time. Our own abilities really don't count.

How available are you to God? He bought you at a premium price—the life of Jesus. Do you sometimes think He didn't get a very good bargain? Take another look at the Corinthians. They didn't have much worth in the eyes of the world, but God deliberately chose the foolish things, the weak things, the despised things of this world.

God fully knew the bargain He was making when He sent Jesus to die for us. He carried out that bargain because He loves us as we are, and sees us as we will be when we are fully like Jesus. He also uses us as a means of bringing others to believe in Him, and as He calls us to work for Him His words to us are the same as His words to Gideon: *"I will be with you"*.

What is God asking you to do? Does He want you to take on a position of leadership? Who does He want you to talk to about Him? Is it too hard for Him? Will you trust that He will give you the strength & wisdom you need to do it, or will you be crippled by your doubts? Give them to God, get in and do the work, and watch Him win the victory!

Produced and Printed by MU Sydney Inc.  
St Andrew's House  
Sydney 2000  
Phone/Fax (02) 9267 8372  
© W Mayer 2000

# Bruised Reeds and Broken Vessels

## MU Sydney Bible Studies

2001



### Study 2 GIDEON

#### Dealing with Doubts

Gideon was not from a notable family in Israel, and he was not even a leading member in his own family, but God chose him to chase the Midianites out of Israel's land.

Most groups and families have their natural leaders. School children in Year 6 or Year 11 have a good idea of who will be school captain, even before an election is held. It's easy to decide that we are to be a follower and not a leader, and if we don't feel that we are leadership material, we may reject opportunities that God is giving us to serve Him. Then we miss out, and others suffer.

God's choices are not always our choices. We don't have to be the best, the most qualified or talented to do God's will and be part of His plan. God doesn't need our abilities, He is more than capable of achieving His purposes despite us, as He showed Gideon by defeating over 120,000 Midianites with just 300 men from Israel. He uses us as we are.

God put a leadership opportunity squarely in Gideon's way, but Gideon still had doubts. What can we do when we doubt our ability to lead, or are just unsure whether God is really calling us to do a particular task? Let us follow Gideon's example and take our doubts to God. Ask Him to confirm what He wants you to do in a way that is meaningful to you, and then look for His answer. Don't use your doubts as an excuse not to act, trust God, step out in faith and see Him turn your doubts into amazement and praise at all He can do through His chosen worker—YOU!

*Note: You may need to choose a selection of questions to discuss if your group has limited time.*

## Judges 6

6 Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help. 7 When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, 8 he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 9 I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. 10 I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me." 11 The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. 12 When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." 13 "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." 14 The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" 15 "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." 16 The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together." 17 Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. 18 Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you." And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return." 19 Gideon went in, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak. 20 The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And Gideon did so. 21 With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared.

1a) What was the first thing the angel of the Lord said to Gideon?

b) How did Gideon reply?

2a) Why did he doubt God's presence with the Israelites?

## GIDEON

### Dealing with Doubts

It's easy to complain about how badly the world is going. There's plenty of ammunition about. Wars and injustice, homeless refugees and family breakdowns, illegal drugs, racial tension, pollution .. the list is endless. Many people feel like Gideon did when we talk to them about God's love. *"If the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."* Today people are more likely to conclude, not that God has abandoned us, but that God doesn't exist at all because of the world's problems.

God's prophet had already answered Gideon's question, but Gideon had not heard the reason *"I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."* The things that happened to Israel, just as the things that are going wrong today result because our societies don't listen to God. He made us and the further we move from living in the way he designed us to live, the more we will experience terrible consequences.

However, God didn't repeat the message He had given the prophet. He had a new message to give to Gideon. God was sending Gideon to deliver Israel out of Midian's hands. It's always easier to complain about problems than to take part in solving them, and Gideon hadn't expected this response from God at all. He felt totally unfit for such a task. He didn't come from the right family, so he wouldn't have the right connections. Even in his own family he was a very unimportant member. Surely he must have misunderstood God's words! But God's choices are not the world's choices, and God gave Gideon a sign that he was God's choice by sending flame from a rock to consume the sacrifice Gideon had prepared.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians that God's wisdom is totally different to the world's wisdom. The people God chooses are often those the world has rejected. Even Paul's own message that brought life to the Corinthians was *"not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."*

Have you avoided talking about your faith in Jesus because you don't think you are good at speaking? People don't come to a faith in Jesus because our words convince them. They come because God's Holy Spirit brings them. He takes our halting, inadequate words and uses them in ways we cannot imagine. But we have to trust that God will be with us when He gives us the opportunity to speak to someone. Despite God's sign to him, Gideon still had doubts, but unlike many people

- b) When his doubts persisted, even after God's answer, what did he do about it?
  - c) What was his next act, and what can we learn about handling doubts from his example?
- 11) How many men did God choose and why did He choose this number?

Judges 7

19 Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. 20 The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

21 While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled. 22 When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath.

- 12) **Judges 8 v 10 tells us that the Midianites had over 120,000 men. How did God use just 300 Israelites to defeat them?**

**God overcame Gideon's doubts by demonstrating to him that the victory didn't depend on his abilities as a leader or as a fighter. He didn't need the right social position or previous experience. He simply needed to obey God and to allow God to use him.**

**What is God asking you to do? Does a group you attend need leadership, but you feel too unprepared or too busy? Sometimes we need to re-organise our commitments so we have time to do the things God has placed in our path.**

**Will you pray and ask God to show you the things He wants you to do in your family, your church and your community? Will you trust Him to enable you to do them?**

- b) What was the real reason Midian was successfully oppressing Israel? (see v10)

- 3a) In v14 God commands Gideon to save Israel out of Midian's hand, how does Gideon respond? (v15)

- b) What does God say and then do to reassure Gideon?

*There are times when we want to respond as Gideon did when we see a need and feel that God is directing us to meet it ourselves. "I can't, I'm not the right person, I don't know enough, I'm too unimportant, no-one will listen to me."*

*Paul reminds us that God doesn't use the world's criteria when He calls His people .*

#### **1 Corinthians 1v26-29**

26 think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.

30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

2:1 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"-- 10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

4) **What was the worldly situation of the Corinthian Christians when they were called by God?**

5a) **What did God actually choose, and why?**

b) **What has Jesus become for us?**

6a) **What choice did Paul make when he came to preach in Corinth?**

b) **How can that encourage us when we have an opportunity to speak to others about Jesus?**

7) **What is the most important part of any message from or about God? (2v4) Why? (2v5)**

8a) **How does the world treat God's wisdom? (2v6,7,8)**

b) **What is God's wisdom destined to do?**

9) **How does God reveal His plan to us? (2v10) Can you share any examples of how this has happened in your life?**

Judges 6

34 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. 35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

36 Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised-- 37 look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." 38 And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew--a bowlful of water.

39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." 40 That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

7:1 Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh.

2 The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, 3 announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

4 But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

5 So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink."

6 Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. 7 The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place."

8 So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley.

10a) **Gideon started preparing for the work God had for him to do, but he still had doubts. What did he do about his doubts?**

Naomi felt that God was against her because of the misfortunes she had suffered. Why did God let it happen? We've all heard the question, and some of us may have asked it as well. It's true that God permitted the famine that drove Naomi's family out of Israel, but it was their choice to leave, and their choice to stay for ten years, and during those years the men died. We often overlook the way we have contributed to our problems, and if we really trust God, we can learn to accept problems and even disaster with Job's words *"Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"* (Job 2 v10)

Naomi may have felt that God had turned against her, but He was already working for her future good. While Ruth was working in the field, gathering leftover grain, the field's owner Boaz noticed her. Boaz was a close relative of Naomi's family and so Naomi sent Ruth to appeal to Boaz for his help. Boaz was prepared to give help and arranged to buy the property that had belonged to Naomi's husband and also to marry Ruth. Ruth had no claim to anything in Israel, but God was looking after her and Naomi and He gave her a place, not just in Israel, but in the ancestry of both King David and of Jesus Himself.

As a Moabite, Ruth may have not been accepted in Israel's assembly, but God accepted her in a much more important assembly - the assembly of those who love and trust Him. He signified His acceptance of her by her inclusion in Jesus' genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew .

Are there any risks you are not taking, or groups or individuals you are avoiding because you don't feel you are from the right background to influence or be accepted by them? God created us all, so as His child you can trust Him to be with you in every situation.

Are you part of a group that is being unwelcoming to others? Sometimes we can feel that for the good of the rest of the group, it would be better if one person left. Is that what Jesus would want? What can you do to help the group change its attitudes? If they won't change should you still be involved?

Ruth didn't let her background stop her joining a society that she knew would look down on her, and would be unlikely to accept her. Her focus wasn't on her own position, but on what she could do to help Naomi. Where is your focus? On yourself or on God and what He wants you to do?

Produced and Printed by MU Sydney Inc.  
St Andrew's House  
Sydney 2000  
Phone/Fax (02) 9267 8372  
© W Mayer 2000

# Bruised Reeds and Broken Vessels

## MU Sydney

## 2001

## Bible Studies



### Study 3 RUTH

#### Accepting our Backgrounds

Is there something in your background that makes it difficult for you to fit in and feel comfortable with those around you? Have you seen a group of people 'freeze out' someone because they felt that person was 'not their type'?

Humans seem to have a strong territorial instinct, and resent others they don't know coming into their 'home territory'- even if it's a stranger sitting in 'your pew' at church, or 'your seat' on the train. It's even worse if the 'interloper' has something else that is different about him or her, and if that difference is something you already don't like, they have very little chance of being accepted.

Ruth came from a nation that had a history of obstructing God's people, and as a result were excluded from the Lord's assembly. She was not born into the nation of God's chosen people and she could have used this as a reason to stay with her family and friends - all that was familiar to her. Instead she chose to join herself with God's people, leaving her past behind and making a new life caring for the woman who had introduced her to the living God.

Ruth didn't worry about what the Israelites would think of her, and whether she would ever overcome the exclusion from the Lord's assembly. She simply got on with the job of looking after Naomi and herself, followed the suggestions of Naomi, the one who knew the local customs, and left the rest to God.

Can you trust God to be with you when you are new or feel uncomfortable in a situation with others? Or are you so busy worrying about how you feel that God has no way of showing you what He wants you to do?

*Note: You may need to choose a selection of questions to discuss if your group has limited time*

The full story of the Israelites encounter with the Moabites during their exodus from Egypt is found in Numbers 22—24. What happened is summarised in the passage below.

**Deuteronomy 23 v 3** No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. 4 For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you.

5 However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you.

6 Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.

- 1a) Why were the Moabites excluded from the Lord's assembly?
- b) What did God do with their attempt to harm Israel?
- c) Can you think of a modern example when God brought good from intended harm?

**Ruth 1:1** In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons.

4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. 9 May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return

## Study 3 RUTH

### Accepting our Backgrounds

The Moabites were not looked on with favour by the Israelites. They were excluded from the Lord's assembly and Israelites were not to make friendship treaties with them because they had refused to help the Israelites on their way back to the promised land, after leaving Egypt. To make matters worse, the Moabite king tried to hire the local 'prophet', Balaam, to put a curse on Israel, but God turned the curse to a blessing and instructed the Israelites to limit their dealings with the people of Moab. (Deut 23 v3-6)

During a time of local famine, an Israelite family moved from Bethlehem to Moab, probably only intending a short stay. That stay extended to 10 years, and during that time Elimelech, the father, died. The two sons married local girls and then both sons died, so Naomi, the mother, was left with only her two daughters-in-law. Naomi decided that there was nothing left for her in Moab, and as the famine was over, she planned to return home. But first she told her daughters-in-law to return to their families so they could start new lives. Both the young women wept at the prospect of leaving Naomi, but Orpah reluctantly left to rejoin her family. However, Ruth refused to leave Naomi telling her "*Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.*" (Ruth 1 v 16,17)

Ruth's commitment to Naomi was total. For her sake she was prepared to give up her family, her friends, her culture, the security due to her as part of the society she was born into and everything that was familiar to her. She exchanged that for an unknown future of hard work in a foreign culture, with no men to protect or help her. Why? Because she loved Naomi and had learnt to love Naomi's God. She didn't want to take the way out that was offered to her, she would keep that commitment to the end of her or Naomi's life.

How many people today keep the commitments they make with the determination Ruth showed? Our marriage vows are made 'for better or worse', and Ruth was certainly experiencing the worse in her life, but she persevered. What commitments have you made, and how seriously are you treating them? Are you giving as much as you committed to, or has time blunted your enthusiasm and, although you aren't opting out, are you just marking time? What will you do about it?

Things didn't really get better for Ruth when they arrived in Bethlehem. Naomi couldn't help remembering how different her life had been when she left, and didn't seem to find Ruth's presence of much comfort. Like many people today,

Uzziah, 9 Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10 Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, 11 and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. 12 After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, 13 Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, 14 Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Eliud, 15 Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

- 13) **Looking at Ruth 4 v 17, and Matthew 1 v 5,6 & 16, name two famous people who were descended from Ruth.**
  
- 14) **How does this show that God had accepted her, a prohibited Moabitess, as part of His people?**
  
- 15a) **Is there somewhere that God is asking you to go that you feel uncomfortable because you don't 'fit in'?**
  - b) **Will you trust that He has a purpose for sending you there, and look to see what that purpose is?**
  
  - c) **How can you help someone else when they don't fit in to a group?**

Ruth committed herself to Naomi and Naomi's God, and appeared to give up the chance of a new husband and family by leaving her own society and joining one that excluded people of her nationality from the Lord's assembly.

She didn't dwell on her disadvantages, or on what she had left behind, but got on with the task at hand of looking after Naomi and herself.

God is no-one's debtor. Not only did He provide her a new husband and a son of her own, He accepted her as one of His own people by allowing her the privilege of one of her descendants being Israel's greatest human king, and giving her a place in Jesus' genealogy.

home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me--even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons-- 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!"

14 At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

20 "Don't call me Naomi, " she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

- 2a) **What brought Elimelech and his family to Moab, and how long did they stay?**
  - b) **How did the composition of the family change during that time?**
  
- 3) **What did Naomi tell her daughters-in-law to do?**
  
- 4a) **How did they respond?**
  - b) **What does that say about her relationship with them?**

- 5a) What choice did Orpah finally make?
- b) What was Ruth's final choice? Why?
- 6a) What were some of the things Ruth was giving up by this choice?
- b) For what was she exchanging them?
- 7) Have you ever given up something for God? What did He give you in exchange?
- 8) Who did Naomi hold responsible for her suffering?
- 9) In what way had she and her family contributed to this suffering?
- 10a) What comfort did she have that she appears to have overlooked?
- b) How do people today act in a similar way to Naomi?

Ruth's kindness to Naomi came to the attention of Boaz, the owner of the field where Ruth went to pick up leftover grain for food for Naomi and herself. Naomi

told Ruth how to appeal to Boaz for help, and when Ruth obeyed, Boaz agreed to help by either persuading their nearest relative (the kinsman-redeemer) to support them, or to do so himself. (See Ruth 2 & 3)

**Ruth 4 v 9** Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. 10 I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!"

11 Then the elders and all those at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. 12 Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

14 The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! 15 He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

16 Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him.

17 The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

11) What did Boaz do for a)Ruth and b)Naomi?

12) How did God turn Naomi's despair into happiness?

**Matthew 1:1** A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, 4 Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, 7 Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, 8 Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of

call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed.' (Matthew 26 v 74) His denial is complete, he can never again claim to be strong enough to stand for Jesus when others failed. However, the root of pride and self-confidence that caused his boastful assertion had also been removed, as Jesus knew it needed to be.

From now on Peter would depend on the Holy Spirit and not on his own strength of character to enable him to stand for Jesus in situations even more dangerous than the High Priest's courtyard. Peter would never again deny Jesus, but before he faced others in Jesus' name, he had to face Jesus himself.

Jesus appeared to the disciples as they were fishing. John 21 v 14 tells us that this was the third time Jesus had shown himself to his disciples since His resurrection. Peter doesn't show any reluctance to face the Lord he had denied, his impulsiveness exerts itself again and he jumps into the water to reach Jesus more quickly than the boat. Jesus doesn't hold Peter's denial against him, but He knows that it needs to be faced and dealt with, before Peter can move on.

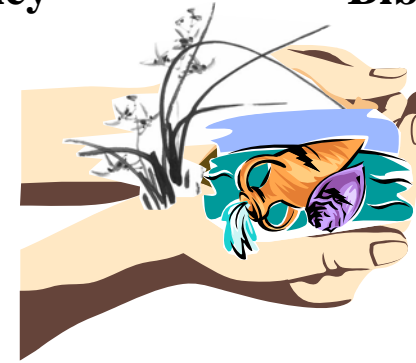
Jesus speaks to Peter by himself, and causes him to face his relationship as it actually is. 'Do you love me?' Jesus asks Peter not once, but three times, once for each time Peter denied him. This is the question Jesus asks us as well. We may have failed Jesus in the past, but the vital point is do we love Him now. If we can answer 'Yes Lord, you know I love you', just as Peter did, then He can give us the work He has planned for us just as He did for Peter.

Face past failures in the light of your present relationship with Jesus. Do you love Him? If so, which 'sheep' is he asking you to feed? Will you do it trying to use your own strength of character, or will you ask the Holy Spirit to turn your past weaknesses into a witness to His power?

Produced and Printed by MU Sydney Inc.  
St Andrew's House  
Sydney 2000  
Phone/Fax (02) 9267 8372  
© W Mayer 2000

# Bruised Reeds and Broken Vessels

## MU Sydney Bible Studies 2001



### Study 4 PETER

#### Failure and re-instatement

**Most people have something that they wish they hadn't done, or said or had done differently, do you? You would love to have your time over so you could try again, and yet you fear that if you did have to face an identical situation, your reactions would be the same as they were the first time.**

**The events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion seemed to move too quickly for Peter to think clearly. At one moment he tries to defend Jesus with his sword, and a little later he denies he ever knew Jesus - not once, but three times.**

**Do you feel you have let God down by not standing up for Him or His standards? Do you find it hard to express your viewpoint when other people are stating different ones? If you do, there are many other people who feel the same way, but what can we do about it?**

**Jesus knew how Peter felt about denying Him. He didn't discard Peter, love him any less or give him an easier task to do. He asked him to face the facts about his relationship with Jesus. Despite his actions, Peter did love Jesus. Jesus accepted that and gave him work to do for Him.**

**Do you love Jesus? If you do, then Jesus won't allow any past failures to stop you serving Him. He still has work for you to do, and it isn't just token things that you can't make a mess of. Whatever work Jesus gives us to do is important for His kingdom.**

**John 18:1** When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed

*Note: You may need to choose a selection of questions to discuss if your group has limited time*

the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. 2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. 3 So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" 5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) 6 When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

7 Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

8 "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." 9 This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) 11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" 12 Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him 13 and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. 14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.

15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, 16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

17 "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." 18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

....25 As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." 26 One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

**Matthew 26 v 69** Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. 70 But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"

73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." 74 Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed.

75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

**1a) What was Jesus main concern as He was arrested? (John 18 v9)**

## Study 4 PETER

### Failure and re-instatement

If you were to choose how to describe Peter, the word 'impulsive' would have to be high on the list. Peter seems to say or do the first thing that comes into his mind. In Matthew 26 v 33 when Jesus says that this very night they will all fall away on account of Him, Peter will have none of it. Others may fall away, he tells Jesus, but I never will. Jesus' reply, that Peter will deny Him three times before the rooster crows, reminds us that Jesus knows the worst about us, but still loves and accepts us. He took Peter and the other disciples who would also run away to Gethsemane with Him. John 18 shows us how careful Jesus was to prevent any of His disciples being hurt during His arrest.

Peter, once again the impetuous one, sliced off the ear of the High Priest's servant, Malchus, and Jesus had to prevent trouble by ordering him to put his sword away and healing the ear (Luke 22 v 51). After Jesus was taken away, Peter went with John to the High Priest's courtyard. He still wanted to do something, to be as close as was possible to where Jesus had been taken and to find out what was happening. But here things went wrong.

Peter, the one who was prepared to defend Jesus with his sword, who would never fall away from Him, no matter what the others did, is asked by a servant girl if he is one of Jesus' disciples. Women were not considered important in either Jewish or Roman society. A woman's testimony was not acceptable in a Jewish court of law, and a woman servant was just about as low as you could go on the social ladder. But there were others around, and Peter has to answer quickly. 'I don't know what you're talking about' came his reply. An easy answer to get him away from being the focus of attention. He walked away from the servant, only to be confronted by another girl who tells those around that he was with Jesus. His reply came even more plainly this time 'I don't know the man', he responded.

We may try to diffuse a situation, or to get ourselves out of trouble by pretending not to understand what is being asked of us, like Peter, but we will usually find that sooner or later we are confronted with the need to state where we stand. The longer we put it off, the harder it becomes and we can find ourselves moving from what we consider a 'half truth' (it sounds nicer than a 'half lie'!) to a full-blown lie.

Peter's ordeal hadn't finished. His speech drew attention to him and he was asked a third time, as he was obviously a Galilean, 'aren't you one of them?' Peter lost control, will this interrogation never stop? 'Then he began to

- c) **What was Peter's reaction to this repeated questioning?**
- 12a) **Why do you think Jesus questioned Peter that particular number of times?**
- b) **What was Jesus' next instruction to Peter? (John 21 v 19)**
  - c) **Is there anyone Jesus is asking you to 'feed' by encouraging, praying or teaching them about Him?**
- 13) **Considering the fact that Peter had denied Jesus, not once, but three times, did Jesus start him back with some 'easy work'?**
- 14) **How can we give people a second (or third) chance, without setting them up to fail again?**
- 15) **Has God ever given you an opportunity to make good where you have formerly failed? Is there anyone who needs you to give them a second chance?**

Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him, but He also knew that after the Holy Spirit came Peter would witness for Him in many difficult and dangerous situations. Jesus didn't give up on Peter, He loved him despite his failure and despite the pride that preceded the failure. Jesus doesn't give up on us either, no matter what we have done in the past. Will you ask Him to turn your area of weakness into an area of witness for Him? Do you trust Him to do it? Watch and see!

- b) **What was Peter's first reaction when Jesus was arrested by the soldiers? How much considered thought do you think went into his action?**
- 2a) **Who was the first person to ask Peter if he knew Jesus after the arrest?**
- b) **How important would that person have been considered by society?**
  - c) **How did Peter answer, and why do you think he answered that way?**
- 3a) **Who was the next person to question Peter? (see Matt 26 v 71)**
- b) **How could his previous answer have affected his reaction this time?**
- 4) **When Peter was questioned a third time, what did he add to his former answers?**
- 5) **Have you ever been caught up in a chain of events where one hasty step caused you to take a path you would have rather avoided? Could you share what happened?**
- 6) **What can we do to stop the slide, if we realise that our actions are taking us in a wrong direction?**
- 7) **What happened after Peter's third answer? (Matt 26 v 74)**

**Matthew 26v31** Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' 32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." 33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." 34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." 35 But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same. 36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

**8a) Considering Peter's earlier comment to Jesus and Jesus' reply, (Matt 26 v 34) what had Peter now learnt about himself?**

**What was his reaction? (Matt 26 v 75)**

**How had pride played a part in Peter's denial of Jesus?**

**b) Most of us will have things we wish we had handled differently. How can we encourage someone who is suffering because they reacted badly under pressure and feel they have let others down?**

**John 21 v1** Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. 6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. 7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." 11 Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish,

153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

**9a) What did Peter do when he realised it was Jesus on the shore?**

**b) If you have let someone down are you usually in a hurry to ask their forgiveness, or would you rather avoid them?**

**c) Which alternative is better in the long run, and why?**

**10a) What was the first question Jesus asked Peter?**

**b) What did Jesus ask Peter to do?**

**11a) How many times did He ask Peter the same question?**

**b) How many times did He ask Peter to do something for Him, and what did He ask?**