



Catherine
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Facing

Study Notes
FOR SMALL GROUPS & PERSONAL REFLECTION

INTRODUCTION to the series...

What are you facing?

Whether it is a crisis in confidence or a bump in the road of your faith, there is a way through it as we keep the cross of Jesus and the gift of salvation in plain view.

During the preaching series that accompanies this guide, the following issues will be looked at from Biblical and practical viewpoints.

<i>Facing Doubt</i>	<i>John 20: 24-30</i>
<i>Facing Temptation</i>	<i>Luke 4: 1-13</i>
<i>Facing Depression</i>	<i>Psalms 42 & 43</i>
<i>Facing Pride</i>	<i>Mark 9: 33-40</i>
<i>Facing Ourselves</i>	<i>John 21: 15-22</i>
<i>Facing The Right Way</i>	<i>Mark 11: 1-11</i>
<i>Facing the Cross</i>	<i>Matthew 27: 45-56</i>
<i>Facing the Empty Tomb</i>	<i>Matthew 28: 1-10</i>

There are not always easy answers - or even obvious ones - but there remains the promise that Jesus is with us, even in the lowest or most testing moments of our life.

It could be that when you look in-depth at some of these issues, you recognise that you have things to sort out.

I suggest that you pray them through gently.

Having a trusted friend or group leader to help and encourage you will lend some accountability and support.

If you are working through these sessions in a group, remember to be respectful of one another's stories and experiences.

Allow plenty of space before someone else speaks when significant things are shared.

Acknowledging some of the things face as disciples of Jesus, and seeing their roots in scripture can be valuable. My prayer is that we re-orientate ourselves, so that we face then through faith and with our eyes on the hope we have in Jesus.

Enjoy the series!

Love, Catherine

Session 1 Doubt

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

Play a version of Kim's Game using a tray of objects which you bring covered, give everyone a minute to remember what is there and then secretly remove one, so that the group has to work out what's missing. Once it has been worked out - repeat a few times.

(Pro tip: Put plenty of small items on the tray with a few larger ones.)

Pray & Worship 10 minutes

Sing a hymn or a song of faith

Pray

1. For an increase in your trust in God's promises.
2. That God will bless your Group in your discussion today.
3. For a greater faith in God when times are hard.
4. For opportunities to share faith this week.
5. For gentleness and grace in all your discussion and fellowship .

Read the Word 50 minutes

John 20: 24-31 The Passion Translation (TPT)

24 One of the twelve wasn't present when Jesus appeared to them—it was Thomas, whose nickname was "the Twin." 25 So the disciples informed him, "We have seen the Lord with our own eyes!"

Still unconvinced, Thomas replied, "There's no way I'm going to believe this unless I personally see the wounds of the nails in his hands, touch them with my finger, and put my hand into the wound of his side where he was pierced!" 26 Then eight days later, Thomas and all the others were in the house together. And even though all the doors were locked, Jesus suddenly stood before them! "Peace to you," he said.

27 Then, looking into Thomas' eyes, he said, "Put your finger here in the wounds of my hands. Here—put your hand into my wounded side and see for yourself. Thomas, don't give in to your doubts any longer, just believe!"

28 Then the words spilled out of his heart—"You are my Lord, and you are my God!"

29 Jesus responded, "Thomas, now that you've seen me, you believe. But there are those who have never seen me with their eyes but have believed in me with their hearts, and they will be blessed even more!"

30 Jesus went on to do many more miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not even included in this book. 31 But all that is recorded here is so that you will fully believe that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you will experience eternal life by the power of his name!

Doubt can be a battle for most Christians at some point during their walk of faith. The causes can be wide ranging, from a shift in popular thinking in society at large to personal circumstances that go on to affect both your world and faith views. Vaughan Roberts puts the theory that; *“Doubt is not sinful but it is serious. If it is not addressed properly, it could lead further down the road from faith to unbelief and away from Christ.”* p54

In John’s Gospel, we meet the most famous doubter of all, Thomas. We find Thomas earlier in the gospel at 11:16 and 14:5.

Look up these passages in your own Bibles and talk about what we learn about Thomas from them.

Thomas had withdrawn himself from the fellowship of the disciples after Jesus’ death. The others were together when they witnessed Jesus’ resurrection appearance (v24) but Thomas ‘wasn’t present’.

In the space below, note down some of the reasons you might be absent from fellowship after a trauma in your life.

Talk through the pros and cons of being alone in this time.

Grief or a disturbance in our spirit can lead us to withdraw from the Body of Christ in order to deal with our issues. This lack of fellowship and possible removal from worship can lead to some dark places of thought which are not able to be challenged by wise words from fellow disciples. In the withdrawing - if it goes on for a length of time - suffering and loneliness can creep in. It is in these moments that the seeds of lurking doubt can be nurtured and develop into a more fixed and hopeless unbelief.

Take a moment to pause and reflect on the times that doubt has crept into your faith - maybe even still remaining - and notice how you dealt with them.

If they are still there, can you decide to be open to letting Jesus shine his light onto those doubts?

In verse 25, we see Thomas' assertion of unbelief in response to the eyewitness account of the disciples who had seen Jesus. He gives conditions for his belief in the risen Jesus; "unless". It takes a week for Thomas to have satisfaction in his spirit. Verse 26 sees the abrupt arrival of Jesus with the answers to all Thomas' doubts.

Milne says;

Here are two wonders for Thomas. The first is that Jesus is truly raised from the dead and now meets him. But secondly, Thomas' stated conditions for faith are explicitly met in language which proved that Jesus had clearly 'overheard' his earlier stipulations. The 'other world' of the Spirit is not beyond earshot. P303.

Talk about verse 27 and the impact it makes on Thomas' faith.

How does it affect his doubt?

Where does Thomas' challenge to unbelief come from?

What does "*Jesus had clearly 'overheard' his earlier stipulations*" teach us about prayer?

For Thomas, the challenge to "*stop becoming an unbeliever and become a believer.*" (Tenney p195) is given by Jesus himself in verse 27. In Tenney's suggested translation, he draw attention to the doubts Thomas has being part of a process which would ultimately lead to absolute unbelief.

What encouragement or help can you offer someone who is battling doubt?

Talk about the importance of being listened to.

Roberts writes;

Some doubt is caused by unrealistic expectations. If we think that God will preserve us from trouble, or at least always give us the insight to understand why he has allowed it, we will soon be disappointed and may doubt his love. But God has not promised his people an easy life. The great men and women of faith in the Bible, such as those listed in Hebrews 11 were called to keep trusting in what they could not see despite great suffering... We shouldn't be surprised when we face difficulties and doubts; they are a normal part of the life of faith. P61

Thomas' response to Jesus' challenge (28) is powerful for a number of reasons.

Note the lack of description around Thomas' words - he does not seem to move to touch Jesus.

His statement of faith goes beyond 'Jesus the teacher' to 'My Lord and my God'. His questions and his doubts have been transformed by faith and understanding. He sees the deity of Jesus. This runs counter to everything he had learned as a Jew. Tenney draw our attention to this:

The Jewish law was strictly monotheistic; so the deification of any man would be regarded as blasphemy (10:33). Thomas, in the light of the Resurrection, applied to Jesus the titles of Lord (kyrios) and God (theos), both of which were titles of deity. p195

Talk about the defining moments of your faith and how they help you in times of doubt and difficulty with faith.

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Over refreshments, talk about the reality of “facing down doubt”.

Then talk through and pray about of these areas which affect the faith of group members, yourself and the wider church:

Drift: Doubt can lead to lack of commitment to fellowship and worship; which ultimately leads to a drifting away from God.

Truth: When doubt creeps in, go back to the things you know to be true.

Patience: There is a right time for banishing the doubt, until then a listening ear, a willingness to keep going and a commitment to showing up are important.

A Focus on Holiness: We need to get our thinking straight; God has a concern for our holiness (Roberts p67). Pursuit of happiness can be a distraction that leads to neglecting God and his perfect ways.

Maturity: Tenney (p195) states; “In the experience of Thomas, the writer has shown how belief comes to maturity and how it changes the entire direction of an individual life.”

Session 2 Depression

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

What do you do to cheer yourself up when you are feeling low?

Does it help? *Go shopping, eat cake/chocolate/everything, listen to music, pray, worship, go for a drive, exercise, read, go out... etc*

Pray & Worship 10 minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which cries out to God.

Pray

1. Statements of Scripture that praise God.
2. For the person to your right and to your left, that they might be blessed.
3. Invite the Holy Spirit to bring peace and hope to all gathered.
4. For those who are struggling daily with depression & anxiety.
5. For an increase of compassion within the group.
6. For all who work to help those who live with mental health problems.

Read the Word 50 minutes

Psalm 42 (NIV)

*1 As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
3 My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”
4 These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.
5 Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.
6 My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you*

*from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from
Mount Mizar.
7 Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.
8 By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.
9 I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”
10 My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”
11 Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.*

Psalm 43 (NIV)

*1 Vindicate me, my God,
and plead my cause
against an unfaithful nation.
Rescue me from those who are
deceitful and wicked.
2 You are God my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?
3 Send me your light and
your faithful care,*

*let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy
mountain,
to the place where you dwell.
4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God, my joy and my delight.
I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.
5 Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God.*

As we begin to look at ‘facing depression’, it is worth making clear the ground rules for discussion: we do not experience ill health in the same way as each other, and this will include mental ill health. We receive each other’s contributions with a word of thanks and without either seeking to challenge their experience or to diminish their experience because yours is ‘worse’. It is worth saying out loud to one another now that if this happens, it is unintentional and without agenda.

**In a moment of quiet, evaluate where you are at the moment.
Prayerfully acknowledge it before God.**

Depression in all its forms affects many people. This can lead to despair, isolation and a ‘flattening out’ of emotions, which means that perceiving through the senses is not possible. Vaughan Roberts suggests that when depression takes hold in a Christian; *Faith can add another dimension to our suffering in the sense that, if our feelings are deadened, we will no longer sense God’s presence as we used to. It can feel like he has abandoned us ... Psalms 42 & 43 are helpful antidotes to that way of thinking. The psalmist is a strong believer, but he is also depressed.* P 72

As this pair of Psalms was written by the Sons of Korah, it is likely that they were experiencing exile and away from the people of God. It is widely recognised that this is a single Psalm, and as you look through it, you can see repeated phrases.

Talk about the Psalms. Which images are strongest for you? Mark them in your own Bible and put a date by them.

For the psalmist, the image of drought is a strong motif for depression. The tantalising ‘streams of water’ 42:1 are only to be ‘panted for’ in a landscape where the only running water are the tears of the psalmist. Kidner points us to other scriptures for similar use of spiritual drought: “*The psalmist seems to have had in mind the slower agony of drought (cf the similar in Joel 1:20), a condition grimly depicted in Jeremiah 14:1-6 with its withered landscape and dazed, dying creatures.*” P183

Discuss the power of thirst. What relief is there in finding water. If you can, find and watch a nature documentary that shows animals heading for a water hole during the fierce grip of drought.

Consider the desperation that animals and people have to find, ‘life giving water’.

Talk about the trek for water and the journey’s own hardships.

What does the journey towards water demand of the seeker?

Underneath the psalmist’s depression and frustration is the conviction that God is still God and worth praising and worth trusting.

Talk about the importance of remembering the joy of praising God in 42:4 when the words of mockery break in and the psalmist feels those things no longer.

There is no defined time when the downcast soul will find its satisfaction again. The whole of Psalm 42 is one filled with an anxious yearning after God. Kidner writes that;

The ‘stricken deer’ is no camel, desert-dwelling and self-sufficient. He has chosen the blessedness of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, not the deceptive ease of ‘you that are full now.’ P183

How does the psalmist resist seeking a ‘happy feeling’ to help him cope?

Talk about the things that you know to be true of God.
How can you hold on to faith in God when depressed?

Talk about the importance of telling your story as an act of faith and of witness.

The overwhelming love of God, expressed in 42:7 has a resonance that is similar to that of Romans 8; *26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.* (NIV)

Our belonging to God is one in which the troubles and struggles are met with the gift of Jesus, by whose Spirit our deepest needs - unutterable in our depressed state - are still known and met by God.

Depression isn't a 'cheer yourself up' situation. It can go on and on. At the end of Psalm 43, there is still no respite, but the confidence in God's love and power has built up throughout the Psalms.

Discuss how building a better understanding God can help the Christian who faces depression.

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Over refreshments, place a cross in the centre of the group and make sure each person has a cup of tea, and a piece of string.

Light a candle and remind each other that 'light shines in the darkness and darkness has never overcome the light'.

The sense of abandonment and isolation that often accompanies depression can overwhelm. Take time read verse 5 from Psalm 43.

Are you low in your spirit?

Do you know what has caused this pain?

Quietly make a prayer of confession and receive God's forgiveness, and/or make a prayer of commitment to continue to seek after God.

Tie a piece of string to the cross to symbolise your commitment to hold onto God.

Listen to Matt Redman's song , 'Never let go' or one similar that reminds you that God won't let go of you.

Pray for the peace of God to fill the heart and mind of the people next to you.

Session 3 Ourselves

As you Gather *5-10 minutes*

Pass a mirror around the group, and talk about whether or not you like to look at yourself in it. What are the main reasons for and against?

Pray & Worship *10 minutes*

Sing a hymn or a song which celebrates the forgiveness of God in Christ

Pray

1. Affirmations of God's love for you.
2. Acclamations of your love for God.
3. For those whom you love but have not a faith of their own.
4. For courage to face yourself in the presence of Jesus.
5. For a church of increased holiness and obedience
6. For opportunity to share the good news that 'Jesus saves'.

Read the Word *50 minutes*

John 21:15-22 NIV Peter

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you 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 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 Very truly I tell you, 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!" 20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

Facing ourselves is one of the most important things that we must do to be effective followers of Christ and encouragers of others in the Gospel. There can be a tendency within us to look around everywhere other than at ourselves. It is as though we fear that it may be 'selfish' to sort out our own relationship with God in Christ. However, in order that we are able to be honest participators in the Gospel, we must firstly deal with the things within ourselves before we can be of use to God and of help to others.

Write a few lines describing the origins of your own walk with Christ. Where did it begin? Who was involved?

Jesus takes the disciples back to the beginning in John 21 as the Gospel concludes. Milne points suggests it is;

An image of the Christian life which surfaced in the very first chapter where Andrew and unnamed disciple of John the Baptist are directed to Jesus by John, 'and so they followed [him]' (1:37). pp 315-6

Our beginnings in discipleship often involve a direct encounter with Jesus. Over time, the power of that encounter may have been clouded by fear, guilt or shame; all powerful faith-inhibitors. It can be useful to go back to the beginning to remind yourself of the raw bones of your discipleship which were based on meeting Jesus and obeying the call to 'Follow Me'.

What words of advice would you offer yourself as a new disciple?

If you as a new disciple could offer some words of advice to your older self, what would they be?

The pursuit of holiness means that we allow Jesus to consistently call us to account for our flakiness and our denials of him. Peter is brought to account in the midst of his peers 'after supper'. Notice that as Jesus addresses him, it is as Simon. Talk about Milne's assertion that;

Jesus is facing Peter with his own limitations so that he might entrust himself in a new way to Christ's leadership. Simon on his own will always be Simon. He has no capacity to rise beyond that. But Simon trusting in Jesus is Peter-the rock, from whose witness and leadership the church will receive its earliest foundation. p 316

It is so important that Peter has faced his own shortcomings, and owned his own denial of Jesus by the fire during Jesus' trial. It is no accident that this is another fireside chat and another fireside challenge to his faith. There are the weighty reminders of first calling and the awfulness of failure accompanying Peter into this encounter. Still, he must face himself in order that he might become the person whom God had called him to be. Cook (59) reminds us that; *Failure is never final with God. Here is the condition of faithful service; dealing with sin.*

Talk about the different reasons we give for not dealing with sins/issues.

What are the ultimate consequences of not facing up to them?

Reflection & Refreshment *25 minutes*

Over refreshment, talk together about the importance of being holy.

How is holiness achieved?

What is the purpose of holiness?

“Facing yourself means looking intently at Jesus and allowing him to look at you.”

Talk about how this theory challenges you and whether it makes you comfortable or uncomfortable. What are your reasons?

Pray together

Bruce Milne writes, in his commentary on John's gospel;

A relationship with Jesus begins when, in his presence, we face up to all that grieves and contradicts God's holy will in our lives, whatever this may cost us. p 217

Final thoughts... Unless you are facing yourself in this way on a regular basis, you don't have a relationship with Jesus; but when you do, there is the space and trust in which to grow and flourish as a disciple and be of great worth to the mission of God in Christ.

Facing the Right Way

~ a mini-study ~

Mark 11: 1-11

Facing the right way is an excellent starting point for us as disciples.
Jesus 'set his face to go to Jerusalem'. Luke 9:51 (NRSV/KJV)
Jesus has chosen the direction that he will face.

What will be the consequences of Jesus choosing to face this direction?
It makes good sense for us to be facing the same direction that Jesus is travelling in, so that we might see and appreciate what he does. In this account, we see Jesus calm and in control, with a knowledge of donkeys and their whereabouts - which disciples must acquire for him. We see a down-played entrance into Jerusalem, but among a group of 'many people' who are willing to enter into the drama as they face towards Jesus with Palms and Shouts (Psalm 118:26-28) and witness the humility of the king riding on a colt as described in Zechariah 9:9-11.

How important is it that you are willing to be directed by Jesus and to move at his direction?

There is much Messianic implication in the manner of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It is likely that this was not noticed at the time it happened. Being part of Jesus' story today doesn't always need our full understanding of his plan or ultimate purpose. It does require our initial willingness to be present, to look to him and to join in with obedient hearts as we acknowledge and respond to Jesus' prompts along the way.

Have you noticed times when this has been true in your discipleship so far? How can you be alert to being available to Jesus in this way?

As the gospel-writer made sense of the event later on, he wrote it with the under-played gravity that he recognised in Jesus' own approach to ministry.

Have closer look at the entry into Jerusalem in the gospels and compare their tellings of the event.

What do you learn from the different tellings?

Jesus faced Jerusalem in order that he might do the work the Messiah came to do. The disciples present at the entry to Jerusalem would only work out the significance of the Old Testament references after Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

Consider times when you have had a gradual awakening to the meaning of something significant about your faith.

Maybe in response to something you witnessed a long time ago.

In facing the right way, there is opportunity for us to see things of God which we may not understand or even appreciate, yet in even in this most lowly of Jesus' actions, he brings the Messianic promises to fruition.

Keeping our eyes facing the same direction as Jesus' eyes makes a lot of sense if we want to actively be part of God's story and see salvation.

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**60 Years of Worship in the
Heart of Sprowston**

***Shine like Stars
in the Universe***



Philippians 2:15

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Celebrating the Diamond Anniversary Year of
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