

## Faith-building Tools

Online Christadelphian Bible School – July 4, 2020  
Summaries submitted from small group discussions

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### Trusting God: Putting life's challenges in His hands instead of our own

As we step aside and let God do what only He can do, we will witness Him moving mountains on our behalf. How do we know if we are really trusting the Lord in our situation? We should have a deep, abiding sense of peace.

We have incidents in our life of God taking over situations building our faith in and reliance in him.

Through prayer we are expressing our wholehearted trust in God. We are basically saying: "**Lord, I know You want what is best for me, so I'm handing this matter over to You, and I'm looking forward to seeing You act on my behalf.**"

This is the kind of posture of faith that delights the heart of God.

Our initial thought comes from the song by Carrie Underwood of 'Jesus take the wheel' and a personal incident in one of our group's actual experiences of taking the wheel.

1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

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### Seeing the Unseen

Most participants said they were best able to identify God working in our lives in hindsight. Some ways to do this include: keeping a prayer journal to refer to and see how God answers prayers, find "God sightings" - small and large ways that God involves himself in our lives to guide our steps (allowing technology to work to connect to Bible school, healing sick family members, etc), seeing God in nature, and sharing times of overcoming trials with others. This last one enables us to see how others had God helping in their lives - and thus should help us identify when God is working in our lives. Having these things build faith does require an acceptance that God does work in the big and small parts of our lives.

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## **Scripture - Active Reading, studying & meditating**

We had a lovely conversation about the role of scripture in our daily lives and how this can help us become closer to God and stronger in faith.

We started with a presentation from myself on what Active Reading actually is. I used resources at: <https://dlc.dcccd.edu/englishcomp1rlc-units/active-reading?user=dcccd&passw=1dcccd234> to help us talk about what the goals of active reading are, and some strategies to help us dig into the text - reading it carefully and understanding more from it. I also had a few quotes to set the scene - Psalm 119v14-16, Philippians 4v8, Hebrews 4v12.

The discussion turned to how we can bring God's word into our daily life. We can listen to it daily using an app on our phone. This is awesome and the group felt this was helpful, but also that we can potentially end up consuming the Bible a bit like we do social media - taking it in but not understanding, and not spending time digesting and understanding. We thought it could be helpful to read a smaller section and spend time with it, write about it, talk about it. Some of the group have been very impressed with Corinne's class about literature and we talked about how we should sometimes take a different approach to scripture, reading it more like a story. This can bring us closer to the characters.

We talked about the benefit of having a notebook with us while we're reading. This could be just to write questions, write down a verse that spoke to us, etc. The very act of writing will help us take the scripture in a little more.

We talked about the purpose of all of this, which is to change us and our actions. A suggestion from one group member was to find one thing in the text that we can act on in that day. That might be to be encouraging to someone, to speak truth to someone etc. Find an action point and practice putting the Bible into practice. Look for opportunities to mirror the character of God in our lives based on the passage.

Finally we spoke about the need to approach scripture with humility, recognising that we don't always need to know everything. It's good to analyse the scripture, challenge our understanding and be okay with challenging each other and really parsing out what the text is telling us and how we can apply it.

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## **Mentors and peers: creating a strong faith support network**

By entering into meaningful relationships with both younger and older believers that allows one to see other's needs, one humbles oneself, serves others, esteems others higher than oneself and in so doing builds one's faith and the faith of the entire community following Godly principles and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

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### **Service**

We are motivated to do acts of service when we're aware of needs, whether in the body or in the community. We love helping others, but we sometimes have trouble knowing there's a need.

During COVID, new ways to serve have emerged: organized card-sending, Zoom meetings, singing outside of windows at nursing homes, preparing meals.

When we strive to develop the mind of Christ, when we start looking beyond ourselves and focus on the needs of others, acts of service are truly acts of love.

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## **Mentors and Peers: Being part of a faith network**

We focused on what we would look for in a mentor or peer.

Seeking out a mentor or peer requires a willingness to be vulnerable, to admit we don't know something or need help. This being the case, the attributes that people valued in mentors and peers were not only hard skills such as: knowledge, experience, and subject matter expertise but also (and in fact even more importantly) "soft skills". The soft skills people valued were: ability to keep confidence, good listeners, non-judgmental attitude, trustworthiness, available, showing, true concern, being quick to prayer, and willingness to share time.

In summary it was important to people that mentors or peers would be people of love.

Having identified the attributes we would seek in others to be our mentors or peers, we reframed our sentence in terms of what we thought we should nurture in ourselves so that we could in turn be good mentors and peers to others.

The one sentence summary we submitted was:

To become helpful mentors and peers nurture in self: good listening, keeping confidence, knowledge, non-judgmental attitude, be slow to speak and quick to hear, trustworthiness, available, proactive concern for others, love of people, really care, quick to prayer, willingness to share time. In short to be people of love, the love that we ourselves would like shared with us.

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### **Seeking Holiness - Being consciously aware of the cultural forces that can hinder faith**

What does it mean to seek holiness? It means that you are aware that you are separated, knowing that there are places and events where, as a child of God and follower of Jesus, you don't fit in, sometimes you truly feel like an alien. But, seeking holiness is more than 'not fitting in.' It means that, as believers, we take a proactive stance, mindfully imitating our master as we move through our culture, navigating through challenging times and situations with a real hope, making special effort to spend time with God and Jesus alone, but also making time to meet with other believers around God's word. In doing that, we come to notice Jesus' example of turning every cultural challenge into an opportunity to bring a kingdom-focus to the situation. When challenged about the place of children, Jesus said, "...of such is the kingdom of heaven." When asked about taxes, he said, "...render to God what is God's." He counseled the man in a dispute about inheritance to "follow me and let the dead bury the dead;" and he faced every temptation with words from his father's message. He was able to accomplish this only as a result of spending so much intimate time with his heavenly Father.

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### **Music**

Music can be a wonderful way to express ourselves. We use it to praise and worship our heavenly Father. It helps to feel more connected to God, Jesus, and those we sing praises with. Because music drives so much emotion within us, we often express our most powerful feelings through it. It helps to remind us of our faith.

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## **Music**

Our group discussed how music is an important part of Faith building. We discussed various formats that spiritual music is found in our lives and ecclesial service. This includes various styles of spiritual music. Music is our way of connecting the emotional component of our faith in a positive and encouraging way that is pleasing to God.

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## **Trusting God: Putting life's challenges in His hands instead of our own**

Trusting in God involves prayer and letting God take control in our lives. The word 'trust' is an active word (proactive not reactive); as well, trust is an interactive process between God and us. Trusting God requires prayer and action ... *pray as though all depends on God but work as though all depends on us.*

Trust is a cumulative process and thus with practice (and age) we get more trust. Often when we reflect and look back we see God's hand in our lives, and this helps us trust God.

Continuing to ask God what He is trying to teach us helps us to trust Him. When we make major decisions in life we need to trust God. When we are weak we are made strong... God brings us to moments in our lives when all our strength is gone, and it is at this, our weakest moment that trust is the only thing left to hang on to.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made us recognize that God is in control and this has increased our trust in God. Remembering that God knows best, *let go let God*, helps to build trust in Him.

Talking about how we trust God is not a common practice in our group. Sharing our experiences and encouraging others to use the tool of trusting God is vital.

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Proverbs 3:5,6*

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## **Seeking Holiness – Be Consciously Aware of the Cultural influences and Forces that can Hinder Faith**

The culture in which we are immersed, from our family, ecclesia, up-bringing, school, country, or the media which is bombarding us, is a very powerful force which, if we are not careful, can us define us to a great extent. Without our awareness, we can be totally

defined by the culture around us. We all have, however, the ability to change and be transformed from what is natural and comfortable or just "feels right" to what is the correct approach in God's eyes. Any change in culture can be is very difficult and our attempts for us personally to be different from our natural cultural influences can be very challenging.

The expression that "culture trumps everything" can be very true. Just try to change your accent or change the order of service in an ecclesia and this saying will be evident. We are called, however, to be prepared to "*leave mother and father*" and to make reasoned choices for God.

Much of the culture in which we are immersed is small and innocuous but some aspects can be significantly harmful. Without effort it can lead us away from Scripture and God. A good example is the "ME First" philosophy, so prevalent in the world around us.

Part of the culture of who we are as believers comes from scripture and the Spirit of God. This scriptural culture is what that binds us together as a community in Christ, despite our diverse backgrounds.

As a practical tool to help us be aware of our cultural influences, which we may not be aware of, is to first expose ourselves to other cultures, points of view and diverse thought. This may initially feel uncomfortable but it is something we should not be afraid of even though it may lead to new territory (growth) for us. When we see differences from we see, feel and think is right, either in scripture or in the world around us, the next step is to do a careful, reasoned and objective look to what scripture teaches on the subject. We need to be careful not to just look to scripture to confirm our own preconceived ideas and cultural biases. A prayerful trust in God to help us form our thinking is key to discernment on these difficult subjects. The proverb "*lean not on your own understanding*" (*Prov 3: 5-6*) is good advice in this context. This approach should drive away any wrong thinking, philosophy and behavior, or confirm what we thought was right and draw us in closer alignment to God. *James 4: 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

In the end , being able to recognize these powerful but often concealed cultural influences and then being able to discern what is and what is not aligned with God can be mind transforming, very comforting and strengthening to our faith.

In summary, trust not in your own understanding, embrace diversity, explore other points of view , objectively analyse and compare to scripture, submit your will and thinking to God , and look to God to help you transform to a Godly culture.

## Walking with Jesus

One of our group told us that years ago, they left another church, started to read the Bible for themselves, realised that it was different from what they had been told and so called up a person they knew was a Christadelphian and asked to talk it over.

This individual picture points to a greater pattern that we all participate in. Knowing and walking with Jesus means hearing his teaching, reading the accounts of his life and ministry. Then responding to it, engaging with others who too want to know Jesus and respond to him as Lord.

Our group all spoke of the changes that our current situation poses to time itself. We spoke of filling our time with worthwhile things (reading scripture, meditating on it, prayer, reading books, listening to hymns etc). We also noticed how we struggle as our regular face-to-face meetings are suspended, we realise how much we gained from being with our community. As we closed, we thought about how important it was for those who were first preaching Jesus to have been with him. Matthias is chosen in Acts 1:21-22 because he had been with Jesus and the disciples, seen what they had seen, heard what they had heard and was a witness, just as they were. Walking with Jesus was very important. We too benefit from walking with Jesus, thinking about his words, following his footsteps, and filling our lives with people who are also trying to be like him, waiting for the King who will reign over a restored earth.

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## Prayer

We used Luke 11:1-13 as a discussion starter - *"Jesus was praying in a certain place and was asked by one of his disciples, Lord teach us to pray..."* and he gave them the "template" of prayer and directives about asking, seeking, knocking in prayer.

We concluded with the notion that the disciples watched Christ pray and **wanted to increase their faith**, thus asking, "Teach us to pray."

Our group came up with the following conclusions about how prayer increases faith:

There are certain places, sanctuaries, connecting spots that bring us closer to God and fill us with gratitude as we praise Him in prayer. (Most have places in nature and one participant discussed a seat left open in his home for his angel. This was his place of prayer.) These places bring out emotions which increase our faith in our amazing Creator.

Elements of prayer that build faith include:

Vivid and very clear prayers - "God's going to heal me sooner or later" so I picture his healing hand and never limit His abilities. I visualize what I am talking to God about and that picture becomes very real - increasing my faith.

Prayer Journaling - Allows God to work in our thoughts - I begin with a thought and very often come to a point where I know that God has directed my thoughts and helps me finish; finish the prayer in a way that leads to His will being done.

Pause and Listen - Selah- this gives me time to acknowledge God's presence and to consider His answer, His majesty, love and glory.

Believe that He always answers prayer - When asking God with the true desire for "His will to be done" a huge weight is lifted. He will answer the prayer - perhaps with an answer we may not like or we may wrestle with but fully believing that "all things work together for good to those who love God..."

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## **Knowing Jesus**

- Immediately after waking up EACH day, saying good morning to God & Jesus
- Creating small but achievable resolutions and asking Jesus for help.
- Working on telling Jesus ALL you are thinking.
- Create your own personal garden of Gethsemane for private prayer.
- Isaiah 61: 1-3; What is our "why"-motive
- Ask Jesus for comfort and guidance to help me understand what my calling is!
- John 3: 17
- Learn/listen to the song "Knowing Jesus"
- Read the lyrics to the PTL hymn book #165-for the joys & for the sorrows....Jesus is all I need!
- Put my problems in my hand....visualize them...give them to God and Jesus
- What ever communication methods you choose, it takes action and commitment to build up faith
- Building a relationship with Jesus takes honest commitment.
- Starting the week with our Memorial Service is vital to building faith.
- John 10; I am the good shepherd...I know them and they KNOW me!
- Remind ourselves the great thing Jesus did!
- Relationship between the Shepherd & flock is vital for health and safety. And these are essential in a friendship....do you consider Jesus as your VERY BEST friend.....one in which you can honestly tell Him all of your failures/weaknesses.