

Promises, Promises (#3)

- Do you promise to be faithful in reading the Bible and in prayer?

Promised Too Much?

- Have you ever found yourself in the situation where you've promised too much?
 - sponsored a small child - they've done a million laps of whatever it was they were doing - and it comes out at a huge total!
 - or promised to meet someone on a day you simply didn't have time to?
- We've all had that experience - and its not a pleasant one!
 - both for the person we've let down;
 - but also for us - leaves the bitter taste of disappointment in our mouths
- Maybe thats what you feel when I start talking about being faithful in reading the Bible and in prayer?
 - a bit guilty;
 - with a sense of disappointment and failure;
 - maybe with an uncertainty about why reading the Bible and praying is meant to be a good idea in the first place...
 - maybe you've tried it in the past, and didn't seem to make much difference...?

What's the Point?

- So, what is the point?
 - To help keep us in touch with Jesus!
 - that's the context in which these promises are made, a declaration of faith;
 - the point of the promise is to help us keep and build up that relationship.
- Which is exactly what the first disciples were doing in the passage we read:
 - they were out of their depth;
 - without their Lord in the way that had been true;
 - wondering: "what was the deal with Judas?"...
 - wondering: "what do we do next? who takes his place?"...
- What all of that boils down to is this question:
 - "Jesus, how do I take your perspective?"
 - they were Jesus friends and followers, those who recognised him now as Lord and God
 - they wanted to know how to deal with their current situation as his followers
- And the answer lies in looking at the Scriptures and in prayer:
 - these are the tools of their relationship with Christ

Tools of Relationship

- Every good relationship has times or places or routines that foster and strengthen that relationship:
 - it might be round the kitchen table for a family, the regular routine reminding everyone that they are part of the family, not just a collection of related individuals
 - it might be the special places - favourite restaurants, favoured walks - that give a couple the space and time to renew and restore their relationship with one another
 - it might even be the kinds of regular communication that keep a workplace going
 - the nurses handover between shifts, the memos and information that lets a workforce know what's going on so they don't feel in the dark but part of the team...
- The disciples here are simply copying Jesus own example in his relationship with

his Father:

- over the years they'd been with him they'd seen him - and heard him talk about - how he maintained that relationship with God...
- in temple as a 12 year old, debating the Law - in his Father's house, chewing over the Scriptures;
- retreating early in the morning to pray;
- using Scripture to respond to temptations;
- etc, etc!
- Jesus, "on his own" while here on earth, fostered, protected, even deepened his relationship with his Father:
 - and he did so in prayer and through the Scriptures
- Very simply, we should do the same!
 - not because the minister says we ought to - but because it fosters closeness with God!

Bible Study

- Variety; freshness; SU Method; Notes; Bible in a Year; on our own; with others...

On your own - SU Method

- Many people find helpful to read their bible everyday...
 - often with the help of notes... selection at the back...
- **Prepare:** pray!
- **Read:** slowly, carefully, in a helpful translation (NIV; GNB; CEV; Message)
- **Explore:**
 - what's the main point of the passage?
 - what does it highlight about what God is like?
 - is there a promise, or a command, a warning or an example to take special notice of?
 - how does what I've read help me understand myself, my situation and my relationships?
- **Respond:** worship? resolve?

With others - Small Groups

- We all need a different balance of time alone and time with others
 - some folk are gregarious, love company, always have friends or family round
 - others spend more time on their own...
- But a healthy life is a balanced one - some of both!
 - and the same is true in our relationship with God!
 - some time alone, reading our Bibles - and as we'll come on to in a minute, praying
 - but also some time together
 - and not just in the large setting of church!
 - *(not the easiest scenario for asking a question, really!!)*
- Getting together with others means:
 - we can ask questions
 - we can share what we have learned... how the Bible passage we're looking at illustrates that or whatever
 - we can be encouraged by the support of others
 - we can be spurred on to live a fuller Christian life by the example of others who we've had the chance to get to know a bit better
- A group, whose purpose is to get to know God better, gathered round His Word, will grow in faith!
 - that's why we've had housegroups over the years
 - and that's why the Kirk Session has sought to relaunch as **Small Groups**
 - 5 sessions this side of Easter, starting on 17th February - two weeks on Thursday

Prayer

- Disciples didn't just study Scripture - where in many ways the balance is towards God speaking to us...
 - they also prayed, speaking with God
- Prayer is that: **our space to speak with the Lord.**
- Not just us speaking, asking, telling either!
 - ever had the experience of a conversation where you've gone to someone with a problem, they've listened as you've explained the pros and the cons, the difficulties and the opportunities?
 - and all they've said is "Uh hu..."?
 - yet at the end, you have a much clearer perspective?
- Prayer can be like that!

Praying on your own

- I've come across various ways of praying over the years...
- one quite simple and helpful model we learned about in YF in Motherwell: **STOP!**
 - Sorry**
 - basis of relationship with Jesus
 - Thanks**
 - balance of relationship with Jesus
 - Others**
 - Jesus was and is always interested in others
 - Please**
 - attitude like that of Jesus, self last;
 - attitude like that of Jesus, did ask his father for things and was answered!

Prayer together

- Equally true of prayer as of reading the Bible:
 - on your own all the time and you'll not continue!
 - with others is good - Prayer Meeting!!! (Thursday and Tuesday am)
- "You may call it coincidence. All I know is that when I stop praying, the coincidences stop happening!"
- **Story of persistent prayer: no.32 "Kidnapped" from "50 five minute stories"**
- *Nepali boy...*

Conclusion

- It would be easy for a sermon encouraging Bible reading and prayer to stray into a guilt trip!
 - to end up feeling that indeed we did **promise too much** when we stood here or at the front of another church and promised to **"be faithful in reading the Bible and in prayer"**
 - **if I've done that, I've not done my job!**

Rather:

- Jesus wants to know us, and for us to know him;
- he has left us **tools with which to cultivate that relationship;**
- he has **booked time in his diary** when he will meet with us;
- **Lets take the opportunities, looking always to meet him, not simply to do our duty!**