

“A New Challenge” Part 1 - how God prepares us for the challenges ahead. July 2024

Thames Valley churches of Christ

Introduction

So far this year, we've explored 'A New Thing' and 'A New Creation'. Now it's time for 'A New Challenge'. Are you facing new challenges? Is your group or your church facing new challenges? If not, you soon will! I wonder how Abraham felt departing from Ur, the disciples of Jesus when he left them to ascend to heaven, or the early Christians scattered by the persecution in Acts 8? Why do these challenges happen? It is not because God likes to make our lives uncomfortable but because it is the way he brings us to maturity:

James 1.2-4

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Today, we will explore one aspect of a model that can help us appreciate how God prepares us and equips us for the challenges ahead. [Trevor Hudson](#)'s model of spiritual growth focuses on the significance of community as one resource God gives us. However you feel about the challenges ahead, it's better when we're not handling them alone!



Although we will focus on the community aspect, pay attention to the four growth channels outlined below.

1. **Our picture of God.** How is your view of God shifting? What resource are you utilising to help you find a fuller picture of God?
2. **Ordinary events of daily life.** What is happening in your life that is developing your spiritual maturity?
3. **Intentional spiritual practices.** What spiritual practices are you using to help you go deeper with God?
4. **Divine friendship with the Trinity.** Hudson puts this at the core of spiritual growth. How do you conceive of 'friendship' with God?

...the gospel invites us into friendship with God. This is a staggering reality. The Creator God who loves us, who spoke the whole universe into existence, and who sustains our lives in the immediacy of each moment wants our intimate friendship.” Hudson

It is vital to believe this truly. No amount of simplistic obedience, teeth-gritting righteousness or sin-control will transform us. We need God as a friend. If we are to be ready for the challenge of growth, we must embrace friendship with the Trinity.

You might like to pause the recording at this point and discuss how you feel about friendship with the divine and what it means to be God's friend.

Exodus 33.11

“Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent.”

Now, let's examine two key areas of Christian community that are crucial to our spiritual growth and readiness for the challenges ahead.

1. In community with individuals

- Our closest relationships are the litmus test of our growth. How can we love one another in a real, deep, and Christ-like way?
- One fundamental way (among many) is by telling each other the truth—in a loving way, as Jesus did to his followers.

Ephesians 4.14-16

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

- 'speaking the truth in love' conversations start with:
 - “I noticed....”
 - “How can I support you?”
 - “What can I pray about for you?”
- Are these 'truth-love' conversations regular? How do you feel about going deeper than the surface?
- Do you believe you have something to offer others in your faith community?
- "As members of God's kingdom community, each of us is given a manifestation of the Spirit in our lives for the purpose of the common good. We all have something to offer because of what the Spirit gives us (1 Corinthians 12.7)." Forgotten God. **Francis Chan and Danae Yankoski**

- **1 Corinthians 12.7**

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

2. In community with the group

- The church is a catalyst for change. A place where it is safe enough to be ourselves and allow one another to influence us to stretch towards Christ.
- Regular collective worship is vital to our spiritual formation because it reshapes us by reconnecting us to the faith community under God’s guidance.
- **Hebrews 10.24-25**
“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”
- Why do we need spurring and encouraging? The world is attacking us, and it is wearisome to resist the allure of sin and the comforts of a selfish life.
- The verse in Hebrews is *not* about clocking in at ‘official’ church meetings. Instead it is a call to devotion to gathering together for the sake of one another’s spiritual wellbeing.
- Do you see congregational gatherings as an opportunity to be encouraged and to encourage others? What challenges are ahead for you and your group? How might you and the rest of the church be there for each other?

Conclusion

- Remember - Jesus sent out his disciples two by two, and everything we see in the Scriptures indicates that his people worked together and helped each other as much as possible.
- "God measures our spiritual health or spiritual dysfunction by the relationships and community and the people around us. (Location 2244)" Wide Awake, Erwin Raphael McManus

For reflection

- What does it mean to you to have healthy spiritual friendships? How do you know they are spiritually enriching?
- What hesitations do you have regarding devoting yourself to spiritual community, and why?
- What are the key ways community can aid your spiritual growth?
- What do you have to offer your spiritual community to help others grow?

You might like to check out his article: "An Invitation to Transforming Friendship" [here](https://renovare.org/articles/an-invitation-to-transforming-friendship): <https://renovare.org/articles/an-invitation-to-transforming-friendship>

Trevor Hudson’s bio: <https://renovare.org/people/trevor-hudson/bio>

Your brother, Malcolm

Please add your comments on this week's topic. We learn best when we learn in community.

Do you have a question about teaching the Bible? Is it theological, technical, or practical?

Please send me your questions or suggestions. Here's the email: malcolm@malcolmcox.org.

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