

## **SIGNPOSTS SERIES – NO 10**

### **GROWING IN CHRIST - LIKENESS**

**Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 12 November 2006**

**Galatians 3:23 – 4:7; Psalm 8; Philippians 2: 5-13; Gospel Luke 12: 6-7**

\*[Series based upon the book of the same title, by Trevor Hudson]

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#### **Preamble:**

In sermon number 4 of this ten-part series, as I introduced the topic, I gave a brief summary of the previous three. Then, in case you thought I might get tedious and do the same each week, making the introduction longer and longer, I promised not to do that; like the childhood song of the old woman who swallowed a fly, followed by a spider to catch the fly, and so on with a procession of insects and animals almost ad infinitum – until eventually she swallowed a horse to catch whatever had gone before! The song ends dramatically, saying “Of course she’ll die!”

Now, as we come to the end of this series, I hope no-one feels like you’ve swallowed a horse... and like the old woman, are about to die! Or at least need more than a few Rennies to deal with your indigestion. In my opinion, one of the best things about Trevor Hudson’s book, designed to bring us into a closer walk with God, is that it is challenging and profound without being indigestible. It is simple, but not naïve; it is profoundly relevant to our lives and very practical. All along it acknowledges the busy-ness and complexity of modern living, compounded by the human sin-condition. And yet it also acknowledges our deepest need and desire to relate to God.

People’s comments suggest that the series has been helpful, and the fact that one of the biggest Christian bookstores sold out of Hudson’s book and had to place a new order, suggests that many were keen to purchase and read it for themselves. The couple of bible study groups that have used it have also found it very good to do so.

In this final sermon, I will be quoting the words of Trevor more than in previous sermons... and also leaving out three whole sections from his final chapter, even though in his book they are no more than a few pages each, because to do them justice in this sermon would make it too long.

#### **Let us pray:**

Lord, thank you for the opportunities that Trevor Hudson’s book has given us: Opportunities to be reminded of your deep love for us and of your amazing grace, to be drawn deeper into friendship with you, and to be encouraged in practical living of our faith in you. Continue to pour into our hearts your gift of grace, that we may see the

world through your eyes, understand the world through your spirit, and engage the world through your heart. Amen.

### **People matter**

In choosing a motto that for Trevor Hudson faithfully describes the life and ministry of Jesus, he comes up with two words: “People matter”.

“From beginning to end the actions and sayings of Jesus are characterised by a profound and passionate concern for people. Understanding this supreme gospel value signposts our way forwards towards the goal of the Christ-following life.

“This goal can be simply stated: *to be a disciple of Jesus is to grow into Christlikeness.*” (Hudson p135)

But what does it mean to be like Christ? And is that not arrogant, to suppose that we mere imperfect mortals should strive to become more like our Saviour? And is it not too daunting a prospect to try to imitate Jesus?

Trevor encourages us, by saying we can find out what it means to be like Christ, by tracing the footsteps of Jesus through the gospels – as we also looked at in the earlier sermons when we were encouraged to “keep company with Jesus in the gospels”.

“Listen to (Jesus) teach as he unpacks the meaning of kingdom living. Observe him carefully in his ministry encounters with everyday women and men. People matter more than anything else. Jesus recognised the image of God in every human being. With uncanny double-vision he sees people as they are and as they can become... From God’s perspective there is nothing more valuable than the human being” as is made clear from the earliest biblical records, including the words from today’s psalm, Ps 8, as the star-gazing psalm writer exclaims with wonder that we have been made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour amongst all of God’s incredible creation. We truly matter!

In the life and ministry of Jesus, God’s attitudes to us become audible and visible. Jesus drew the following comparison:

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6)

“Sayings like these were underlined by the actions of Jesus. Whether it was hugging a little child nagging for attention, touching an outcast leper living on the margins of society, sitting down for a meal with a politically incorrect tax-gatherer or accepting a used and abused prostitute, Jesus acted towards individuals with immeasurable respect and care. He enabled them to realise their sacredness and specialness. He called forth from their depths their very best. People mattered to Jesus more than they would ever fully comprehend and he would love them – and us – to the end.” (Hudson, p136)

“This is the heart that Jesus desires to form in us. Recall that gospel invitation extended by Jesus to the two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, as they cast their nets into the Sea of Galilee. ‘Follow me,’ says Jesus, ‘and I will make you fish for people.’ (Mark 1:17)”

[Trevor writes of this passage, pp. 136-7, saying,]

“For many years I interpreted these words in a strictly [evangelistic] sense. Here, I believed, Jesus was seeking to motivate his disciples into ‘catching people’ for the kingdom. Only after spending a few hours in the company of a committed fisherman did I reconsider my understanding of this text.

“Fishermen, I discovered, are passionate people – passionate about fishes! They prepare for their fishing adventures with painstaking attention, rise from sleep at unearthly hours, fish through the night and day with enduring patience and, upon their arrival home, talk incessantly about their triumphs and near-triumphs! Their hearts are set upon the task of fishing. Knowing this to be true about Simon and Andrew, Jesus in effect says to them:

‘Come with me and I will replace your passion for fishes with another kind. I will form in your heart the divine passion for people. You will learn to see men and women through my eyes.’

This transformation takes time. As Trevor writes, “over the years the poverty of my own eyesight has revealed itself in a variety of ways: cynicism and resentment towards people’s needs, non-responsiveness in the face of visible suffering... and sometimes personal actions and words that I know have brought harm to others. Still today, in spite of really wanting to see people through the eyes of Jesus, these symptoms of dull vision constantly appear.” (Hudson p137)

In his chapter, he expresses three practical “gospel actions” to enable us to integrate this gospel value into our lives: the supreme value of understanding that people matter, and of recognising God’s image in all men and women. These are the three sections I have not covered;

- the first is the gospel action of hospitality – genuine grace and hospitality as also highlighted each Sunday in the invitation to the Lord’s table, graciously extended on Jesus’ behalf to ALL who wish to draw near to God, to do so;
- The gospel action of inclusive love, in which we express the fact that the kingdom of God is made available to anyone, even the enemy of God, who wants to enter;
- And the gospel action of doing good – of adding value to the community around us. The community of Christians taught by John & Charles Wesley, the beginning of the “Methodist movement”, were encouraged on a weekly basis “to avoid evil, to do no harm and to do all the good they could for as many as possible” (Hudson p144).

**Conclusion:**

Hudson concludes, firstly by warning that we need the empowerment of God's Spirit for such living, especially if we are not to become either legalistic or burnt out; it is a necessity to be open to the spiritual resources and energies of the Kingdom of God, and to rely on the crucified and risen Christ, always present with us.

Then he adds: "You and I are called to become like Christ. This goal for the Christ-following life coincides with the desperate needs and challenges of our contemporary world... Learning to live our lives as Jesus would if he were living in our place is not simply the most important thing in our lives; **it is the only thing.**" (p146)

**I end with the same prayer with which I began:**

Lord, thank you for the opportunities that Trevor Hudson's book has given us:  
Opportunities to be reminded of your deep love for us and of your amazing grace, to be drawn deeper into friendship with you, and to be encouraged in practical living of our faith in you.

Continue to pour into our hearts your gift of grace,  
that we may see the world through your eyes,  
understand the world through your spirit,  
and engage the world through your heart.  
Amen.