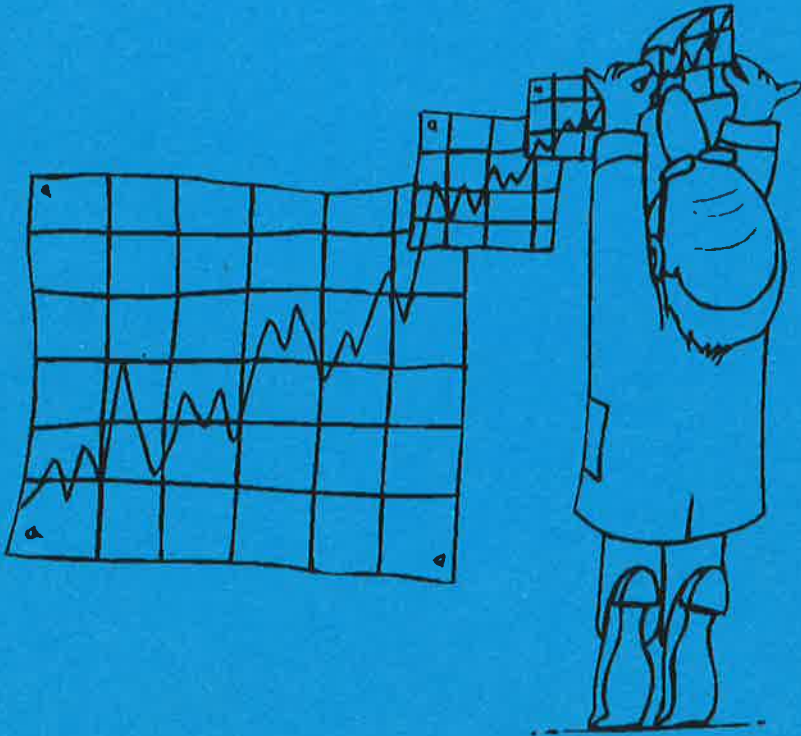


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CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT RESEARCH

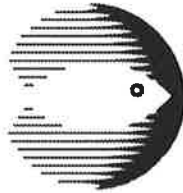
Based on Bible Studies and a Paper
given at the
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Edited by: Heather Wraight



Christian Research 1998

CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT RESEARCH

Edited by Heather Wraight

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INTRODUCTION

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization is a world-wide forum committed to evangelization. It aims include encouraging a holistic approach to mission as described in the Lausanne Covenant and the Manila Manifesto, discussing and promoting issues relevant to evangelistic strategy, and stimulating prayer for world evangelization.

It seeks to accomplish this through a network of national committees, each of which is also a network of individuals, organisations and churches. Leaders in their field are appointed to the position of Senior Associate. Dr Peter Brierley, the Executive Director of Christian Research, is the Senior Lausanne Associate for Research.

Lausanne regularly holds international conferences and consultations dealing with key topics relevant to world evangelisation. The first Researcher's Conference was held in Holland in 1986 and the second, organised by Dr Brierley, in February 1996. 62 attended from 21 countries, about a third of whom either presented a paper or led a workshop.

Four types of researchers attended: those from missions, with an interest in unreached peoples; people working primarily in church planting initiatives; others involved in national research studies or programmes; some concerned with 'implicit religion'.

The conference had four themes: turning data into prayer, turning data into decisions, turning data into growth and turning data into challenge. This booklet contains an edited transcript of the three Bible Studies and a summary of the paper on theology.

One outcome of the conference was a decision to establish an electronic conference. Anyone interested in subscribing my apply to do so by sending an e-mail message to hub@xc.org with only the words: subscribe Lausanne-Research.

STUDY 1

SPIRITUALITY FOR RESEARCHERS

**- seeing and hearing
Dr Bryant Myers**

Reading Luke 8

Introduction

In this study I plan to go through a section of St Luke's Gospel twice in order to draw out some lessons that may be helpful to us as people involved in research.

Luke 8 is a section by itself. It begins with the statement that "after this Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God" and then we find out what went on during these travels.

The chapter starts with a crowd gathering and Jesus telling the only parable which he explained, the parable of the sower. Then we have two short teaching passages, a brief insertion about Jesus' mother and brothers, followed by four stories. These include the crossing of the lake and the great storm; landing the other side and encountering the demon-possessed man; and the story of raising Jairus' daughter, with the story of the woman with the issue of blood in the middle.

All this immediately precedes Jesus calling the 12 disciples together and sending them out. It is a last stage of preparation where they basically learn by doing, or learn by watching what Jesus is doing.

Spirituality and Research

These two words are not usually thought of together but, looking into this chapter, I realised there is an angle which is important for us to consider.

Research is data collection. It has to do with gathering facts and information. But the challenge, the real test, is the interpretation - the analysis. How do you turn facts into meaning, into knowledge - even into wisdom?

In a chapter like this we have in essence a warning that says to us as Christians that the task of turning facts into meaning is much more difficult for us than it is for people who are not Christians. This is because the very tools that you and I use to do this analysis are defective. Our eyes and ears, our minds, our hearts, the tools that we use to listen and see and turn things into meaning, are fallen. They don't work as they should so we don't see the world as God sees it. Over and over in the Gospels we hear Jesus talk about this problem of hearing and seeing.

The Knowledge of the Secrets of the Kingdom of God

After Jesus tells the parable of the sower he announces to the crowd, "He who has ears to hear let him hear". But then when his disciples ask him what the parable means he says to them that "the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that seeing they may not see and though hearing they may not understand." Then he explains the parable.

Apparently one of the keys to understanding this chapter is this phrase about the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God being given to the disciples and given to you and to me. Jesus is saying that we can hear and that we can see better if we follow him. If we are Jesus' disciples we can see and hear better. Paul and James in their Epistles also give the impression that the greater our obedience and our faithfulness the better we will see and hear. In other words, our knowledge actually increases as our obedience deepens.

Seeing and Hearing

Let us go through the stories in Luke 8 and pick up this theme of seeing and hearing. We find the disciples sharing a series of

experiences in which the natural interpretation of what they see and hear is consistently wrong. Not once do they get it right.

The first example is in verse 19, when Jesus' mother and brothers come to see him. Someone announces to Jesus, "Your mother and brothers are outside". Jesus replies "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice".

The disciples see family defined as blood relationships. Jesus redefines family in terms of obedience. He sees family in a different way.

In verse 22 in the next story, Jesus and the disciples are crossing the lake in the middle of the night. A fierce storm comes up and we are told that the disciples are so afraid that they wake Jesus with "Master, Master, we are going to drown."

The disciples see the storm as a threat to life. Their faith is in the power of the storm and so they are afraid. Jesus saw the storm as irrelevant to life and death. To him there are other things that are more important when it comes to life and death. He asks the question, "Where is your faith?"

Reaching the other side of the lake but still in the boat (verse 26), a wild man comes running towards them, the Gerasene demoniac, naked, unchained, crazy. It was a tough night for the disciples if you think about it - I wouldn't want to get out of the boat either!

The disciples saw the Gerasene demoniac as someone to be feared, as a threat to life. We later learn that the townspeople saw him as someone to be chained, controlled and guarded. But that's not what Jesus saw: he saw a man that needed wholeness and made him whole.

Later in the same story (verse 32), the demons ask to be sent into the pigs which consequently go over the cliff and are killed. As a result the townspeople come to Jesus and ask him to

leave. What they saw was not the Gerasene restored to wholeness. They saw Jesus as a threat to their economy and security and asked the Son of God to leave. The man's wholeness was apparently too costly for them.

In the story of the woman with the issue of blood (verse 41), she was seen by the people as an outcast, an embarrassment, someone who should not be there. The disciples saw her as an interruption when they were doing business with an important man. Jesus saw her as something very different. He called her 'daughter' and stopped and healed her.

Finally the people saw Jairus' daughter as dead (verse 49). All the signs were there. The data was clear. Jesus saw something else and restored her to life.

Here we have a series of practicums on seeing and hearing. Not once in this selection of stories is the normal view, the scientific view, the anthropological view, however you want to term the view, correct as Jesus saw it. Jesus saw the same facts, the same circumstances, but he read the situation differently.

Now let us go back over the story of the sower and pick up a different theme. Let's listen to what Jesus says in the story.

Hear the Word - Produce Fruit

The parable of the good seed is about hearing the word of God and responding. Jesus points out that you can say the word of God, you can speak it in four different circumstances and in three of them it will fail. But there is a fourth, the good soil, in which those with a good heart hear the word and retain it. Because they hear and retain there is incredible productivity, far beyond what could be expected.

Hear the word - produce the fruit.

Listen Well

The second story of the lamp on the stand is more difficult. It is clear that the lamp should not be put in a jar or under a bed. It is put on a stand so that everyone can see the light. Jesus continues, "Therefore consider carefully how you listen".

The 'therefore' is strange, what does listening have to do with lamps and light? Jesus doesn't explain it very much but we are back to our theme again. It is all about hearing the word. The lamp on the stand suggests you have to be very careful how you listen, to listen well and really hear what God is saying.

Listen and Obey

In the story of Jesus' mother and brothers his redefinition of 'family' is that they are those who hear God's word and do something with it. We are back to hearing leading to obedience.

Fear and Faith

Finally there is the issue of being very careful where you put your faith. Where do you believe the power is? What are you afraid of? Fear and faith are frequently held in tension with one another. In the boat the disciples were afraid and Jesus' question was "Where is your *faith*?" The absence of faith is not so much doubt as fear.

Where do you believe the power is? On the lake was the power in the storm, or in the man in the boat with them? When they reached the other side was the power in the demoniac, the townspeople, or the man who had come with them? Do we put our faith in our church, our organisation, our keen analytical skills, the Government, the rich and the powerful? What are we afraid of?

There are themes here for spirituality, for listening to the word. We have to hear it. We have to hear it and respond. And that means that this book, the Living Word, is a critical part of being a researcher who has eyes to see and ears to hear.

You have to know this book, not just in the literary sense, but as the Living Word in your life. Sometimes we use the phrase Living Word but the emphasis is on the words and the text. We forget that it is in fact *alive*.

This is God's Living Word and if we put this Word in us, God will do things to us. Hear the Word and listen to it carefully.

Be Careful How You Listen

The Word is used in a lot of different ways but if we are careful how we listen then the Word will point us to all kinds of interesting areas of spirituality, meditation, silence and the different ways of using Scripture.

Too often the devotion is the thing we do before breakfast and then after breakfast we go to work or we have our researcher's conference. We haven't integrated these two universes because one is spiritual and the other is work. If we do that we are not going to listen carefully and we are not going to hear well. We have to figure out how to get the devotions from before breakfast into the entirety of the rest of the day.

Live this Word

Listen to this word, listen to it carefully and keep this word. Live this word, hear God's word and put it into practice.

More than that, we have to get what is in this book and in our life with God into our research and particularly into the handling of the information. The thing that made the prophets unusual was not that they understood what was going on in Israel, that wasn't hard, that is just social analysis. What made them prophets was that they saw it and understood it as God saw it. So they said, 'Yes, everything is fine except this and this and this. This is what God hates.'

In Isaiah's case you had an Israel which was highly successful

by most material measures but Isaiah is saying, 'You are in deep trouble', because he saw the situation as God saw it.

Perseverance and Obedience

In addition to hearing the word, listening to the word carefully, keeping the word and living the word, there is a theme throughout of perseverance and obedience. The 'doing the word' is how we understand, they are not disconnected. They are not one thing being finished, now we start another. Evangelism and discipleship cannot be separated. Discipleship, the acting out of faith, is how we form our faith.

Doing the Word

The biblical challenge is - how are you seeing and hearing as researchers? What are you doing in your life, both individually and in your faith community in terms of your spirituality? What are you doing to take advantage of this incredible thing that Jesus told us which is, "That the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God are given to you"?

He will give you the glasses by which you can make sense out of his word. That's offered as a gift. What are you doing to take advantage of Jesus' promise? What spiritual disciplines inform your research? How do you help yourself by taking advantage of God's offer of help to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we pray that we may live this day well as your disciples, that by the power of your Spirit we would hear your word , we would understand it, we would live it.

We ask that the spirit of this devotion and of your word would carry over into this day and that we would come increasingly to understand that all we do is spiritual work. We love you and we praise you and we thank you in Jesus' name.

Amen.

STUDY 2

INTEGRITY FOR RESEARCHERS

**- eyes and sight
Rev Tom Houston**

Reading Matthew 6:19ff Contemporary English Version

Introduction

Let us imagine we are on the Mount and close to the front of the crowd, looking into the face of Jesus and hearing him speak to us. Let us not look at it as the scholars have tended to make us look at it, as a collation of what Jesus said at different times all put together in a package to suit the five-fold division of the Gospel of Matthew. But let us try and push our way to the front of the crowd and hear Jesus as he says, "Don't store up treasures on earth where moths and rust can destroy them and thieves break in and steal them. Instead store up your treasures in heaven where moths and rust cannot destroy them and thieves break in and steal them. Your heart will always be where your treasure is.

"Your eyes are like a window for your body. When they are good you have all the light you need but when your eyes are bad everything is dark and if the light inside you is dark you are surely in the dark.

"You cannot be the slave of two masters, you will like one more than the other or be more loyal to one than to the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

Integrity for Researchers

Oddly, integrity is not a frequent word in the English Bible but it occurs more frequently in the King James Version than in any of the later versions. You would have thought it would have been one of those words that became more dense in the later translations and with usage. But neither is there frequent use of the equivalent words in the

Hebrew of the Old Testament or in the Greek of the New Testament. However, I will not spend time on a word study but go straight to the New Testament and the passages where the idea of integrity is conveyed.

It is the Greek word 'haploos' with the noun 'haplites' which speaks about singleness, so let us think about the single eye.

In the first study we thought about researchers being ears to the people and I want to build on that and talk about researchers being eyes to the people.

The basic idea behind integrity is wholeness or singleness which is an interesting combination. An integer is a whole number and integrity is about wholeness that can also be represented by singleness. Stated negatively, integrity is about being undivided, unambiguous in intention, single minded. In speech it is speaking without hidden meaning.

A Challenge for Researchers

The challenge for us as researchers is that we might see clearly, having a single eye. "Your eyes are like a window for your body. When they are good you have all the light you need but when your eyes are bad everything is dark and if the light inside you is dark you are surely in the dark." This little sentence or two occurs both in Matthew and in Luke. The words are almost identical but not quite. I want to refer to both passages because in Luke 11 it is placed in a different sandwich from that of Matthew 6. The bit before and after in both Matthew and Luke are illuminating and will allow us to pursue the analogy in ways that will help us.

The focus on the eye is helpful because you could say that researchers are the eyes of the Church. So with this analogy in mind let's look Jesus in the eye and have him speak to us in his sermon. Let's begin with the analogy. Jesus takes his illustration from nature. Let's grasp the three elements in the illustration.

The Eye is the Lamp of the Body

This delicate organ, the eye, is the instrument by which light is given to the human body. Notice the eye does not mean light - you can have a seeing person in a dark room who sees nothing. And light does not necessarily imply sight because you can have a blind person in a bright room who sees nothing. So you have an external factor called light and an instrument by which it becomes active or real for the human body.

The Factor Called Light

In other places Jesus concentrates on the factor called light, 'He is the Light of the world', 'we are the light of the world.' Here he concentrates on the instrument by which the light becomes effective, the eye. If the eye is single or sound, your whole body has good vision or good light. If the eye is not sound or single the whole body has dim vision, lacks good light. In these two emphases there can be deficiency of vision due to the malfunction of the eye and, where this occurs, the whole body is affected by the weakness of one small organ.

The Quality of Sight

The third factor in the analogy is that our sight, our vision, can be of good or poor quality.

Now one of the main factors in vision is discrimination, the ability to distinguish one object from another, one distance from another, whether it's a man or a woman and whether near or far off. When someone comes along the street there is a process going on in which your eye is very active. It is a living thing and not an inanimate thing.

The object comes nearer and we say to ourselves this is a person and not an animal and as it comes even nearer we say this is a man and not a woman.

As the person comes nearer still, all the distinguishing features of the person, their height, their width, their features, their appearance, their clothes, all become clearer. The closer they come to us, the more opportunity light and sight have to act. Distinguishing one colour from another, one shape from another and the relation of things is what the eye is about.

The function of light is not to produce a general awareness of light in the eye and its spiritual equivalent is not a general awareness that we are looking for. It is rather to produce a distinct image on the retina which can be an item of knowledge that leads to a guide to action.

That is probably enough about the picture Jesus uses. It is something we know and of which we have constant experience.

The Big Question

What are the counterparts in the moral and spiritual realm that correspond to this analogy of everyday experience? And for us as researchers what are the equivalents in our role as the eyes of the Church, the Body of Christ on earth?

To look into that I want to use the two contexts in Matthew and Luke.

I suggest the *light* we are concerned with is the true context in which the church or churches operate internally and externally. The eye is the capacity of the research community to view and expound that. The *vision* is the grasp that any church or organisation has of its situation, which informs how it acts and reacts. And that of course breaks down into the individual situations where the process takes place.

But before we leave the analogy we need to register that we are not talking about a natural situation. There is a spiritual dimension to our appreciation of the churches' contexts.

The whole Body, the Church, is emerging from a condition of blindness, ourselves included. We see nothing clearly. We are like the man in the story of Mark 8:24 - having had our eyes begin to be opened we are still seeing men as trees walking. Or we in the Church may need to hear the words of the risen Christ say to us, 'You don't know you are blind'.

The Church is emerging from that blindness but it doesn't all happen instantaneously. So we need always the humility that steps back and acknowledges, as Paul does, that we know nothing as we ought to know and to seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit as we try to understand the data before us.

What else impairs the sight of researchers that compromises their integrity, the singleness of their eye that they need to provide for the Body? Now unfortunately in this instance Jesus does not move out of the analogy and say, 'This is that'. So I propose to try to elucidate this from the context in which the two Gospel writers place the statement.

Short Sight

First of all, as we talk about sight impairment there is a thing called short sight. I have it. If I take off my glasses I can't see any of your faces clearly. In this case Jesus says, "Don't store up treasures on earth where moths and rust can destroy them, instead store up treasures in heaven". Treasure on earth, treasure in heaven. The long range is out of focus. To keep occupied with the near and immediate leads to ignoring the long term.

It is significant that money is the factor that causes this. Money pushes you in the direction of the short term and we all know research can be biased by where the money comes from and also what money the selected data can raise. In practice this slows the whole process down and costs us more in the long run because of the wasted time that the Church spends in following short term conclusions.

If the Body is misled it wanders ineffectively and the lack of long term integrity diverts the Body and leaves it unprepared for the future. While it is good to have goals, short term, medium and long term, it is important not to be too short term at any time or we may be guilty of being short sighted.

Double Vision

The second possibility is double vision. The passage that follows says, "You cannot be the slave of two masters, you will like one more than the other, or be more loyal to one than the other." This is binocular vision. Single vision gives depth to what we see as we see things in relation to one another. When the two eyes are not simultaneously in focus you get diplopia or double vision. This is both uncomfortable for those who have it and unattractive to those who look at it. It can result in a squint or what is called a lazy eye because to avoid discomfort the person who has double vision makes one eye work more than the other to try and get the balance right and true vision.

So spiritually, if you don't have money and God in proper focus you develop a lazy eye for God and keep only the money eye focused. This impairs integrity and we need to be very careful in this whole matter.

Selective Vision

Now we move to the Luke context and we begin with the third factor of sight impairment which I call *selective* sight, because the previous passage in Luke is about leaders who seek a sign. They refused to see the obvious and kept looking for the spectacular. They refused to see the regular and kept looking for the random.

This says a lot about our personality, it's a statement of what is important to the person. The person wants his position or her position to be demonstrated. When it is not, he or she has no time for that sign and looks for another. This kind of researcher rides his hobby horse, and lacks integrity for that reason.

Because his sight is selective and not whole and he leaves the Body to a degree in the dark.

Disproportion

The following passage in Luke 11 from verse 37 is about Pharisees who concentrated on details but were blind to principles. They concentrated on tithing small things and neglected greater matters of justice and mercy and faith. They were more concerned about the outside than the inside; appearances were more important than reality. This is the shop window mentality, when the overriding consideration is 'How do I look?' This disproportion is a great enemy of integrity.

Deficient sight

So how do you know if your eyesight is deficient? There are three ways:-

Comparison with the past. By comparison with what used to be and with what you used to see. When you get older you remember how you used to see certain things more easily. I have a friend who had an operation for cataracts. She was amazed how well she could see only two weeks after the operation and could only then describe her sense of loss of sight because she had got it back again. In another sense, when you have a cataract you remember how you used to be able to see things but cannot see them clearly now and that is important for a Christian. We need to remember how we used to see things and give that a degree of validity.

Comparing with others. When we ask others what they see we may find it is not the same as what we see.

An objective test. You go to have your eyes tested, the man puts the card or diagram up and says, "Read the bottom line." Without a test we do not know our problem. Colour blind people would not know they were colour blind if someone did not tell them.

It used to be the case that in Nairobi there was only one set of traffic lights on Government Road. I remember being driven along that road by a very prominent Christian doctor who said to me, "You know, Tom, I am colour blind." I said, "Are you? Well, how do you handle traffic lights?" "Oh," he said, "It's quite easy. Green is on top and red is at the bottom!" We were within about 100 yards of the lights so I quickly became his interpreter.

So what other people say is important. And here is a word from 1 Corinthians 12, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'." All of us need tests.

Sight is important in many tasks. People can be disqualified from service by impaired sight. You may not get into the Army because you have bad sight.

The Body of Christ can be incapacitated from certain work if its researchers create imperfect sight by their lack of integrity or singleness or wholeness of vision.

So we must test ourselves by what we used to see and by what others tell us. We need to compare what we see with what other researchers see.

Let us remember the objective standard is also there in the Scriptures and we must measure ourselves against it. Where our findings are in accord with the teaching of Scripture then the spiritual vision of the Body will be good. But where it is not, then we need to put ourselves into the hands of the Specialist to rectify it and pray, "Lord, that I might receive my sight and the integrity that will make me good eyes for God."

Summary

Giving this study has been helpful to me because I confess I started off seeing the researchers at this conference as a conglomeration of individuals. But as I prepared this message on 'Integrity for Researchers' I realised that God has been wonderfully gifting his Church with a community of researchers who need to be comparing and checking on one another if there is going to be integrity.

I am so glad that Lausanne has been the banner under which this has happened because we are there to encourage the whole Church to take the whole Gospel to the whole world. Our role is to build bridges of understanding and cooperation between Christian leaders everywhere. I do pray that one of the fruits of this conference will be a greater sense of community and interdependence among us. For if it is like that, so will our integrity increase and so there will be light for the whole Body.

Prayer

Oh Lord, we thank you for your Word and for the way in which it has that capacity to penetrate recesses of our thinking and feeling that other things cannot reach. We put ourselves before you as those who have seen something new and pray for grace to respond to that.

Our prayer is also that the community we represent may become a reality in the exchange of information, in our feeling for one another, our trust in each other and our sense of dependence on each other and all together on you.

Make us eyes for the Body that will give it light, for the glory of Christ, the Light of the World.

Amen.

STUDY 3

WISDOM FOR RESEARCHERS **-seeing and discovering** **Dr Peter Kaldor**

Readings Luke 5:17-25 & Acts 10

Introduction

I think the most common saying I heard at the Lausanne International Conference of Researchers in the UK in February '96 was, 'I am not a researcher'! I wonder what that means? Thinking about it, I wonder if that is a fear from some of us about technological competence or statistical elegance. Or perhaps we feel we have more important things on our minds and research is just one small part of the armoury of what we bring to our sense of call and direction.

It made me stop and think, 'What is research anyway?' and the image I have when I think about that is a very active image. We can picture the University professor sitting very calmly and elegantly in some very nice building just thinking and reflecting some kind of neutral reflection that leads to wisdom. But I don't actually think research happens very often in that way.

I think research is about enquiry, about wrestling with something, really struggling with it. It's about discovery.

Some people analyse what is - in order to describe it.

Other people analyse what is - to point out what could be.

Certainly to me wise research and wisdom in research is the second one.

Some of us may possess a whole lot of technological competence, computer wizardry, statistical elegance and not actually be wise researchers. But some of us who feel we don't have those technical skills may in fact be very wise researchers.

What is Wise Research?

I want to consider two biblical stories that cover three different kinds of researchers, and just think a little about what is wise research. These are very well known stories.

The first, in Luke 5:17-25 is the story of the man let down through the roof. "One day when Jesus was teaching, some Pharisees and teachers of the Law were sitting there who had come from every town in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. The power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralysed man on a bed, and they tried to take him in the house and put him in front of Jesus. Because of the crowd, however, they could find no way to take him in. So they carried him up on the roof, made an opening in the tiles, and let him down on his bed into the middle of the group in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw how much faith they had, he said to the man, 'Your sins are forgiven, my friend.' ... At once the man got up in front of them all, took the bed he had been lying on, and went home, praising God."

Faithfulness

That is a very exciting story of faithfulness. These people had a strong sense of belief, they wanted this man who was sick to have an encounter with Jesus. They went to all sorts of ends to achieve it. They displayed a lot of ingenuity. Their focus on their desired purpose enabled them to feel OK about disrupting a meeting and tearing up a roof. They reflected carefully on what options there were for them to get this person to meet Jesus.

We don't know anything about these people who walk in and out of the Gospel stories. We don't even know if they are religious or churchgoers. But we need to ask ourselves, why they had to let this man down through the roof? Who was in the way of the man having a meaningful encounter with Jesus?

A Sobering Thought

It was the religious people of the time. It was the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law sitting around Jesus, asking questions - which you could say was doing research! They were the ones preventing this man from getting near Jesus.

In my life and actions, in what I do, in my priorities, even in my research, do I ever get in the way of people needing an encounter with Jesus?

Roof Finders and Ring Sitters

Here we have two very interesting contrasts of research in the one story, people with their minds in different bents, with different agendas. We've got the roof finders and the ring sitters. One group thought creatively and used research and reflection to enable them to lay the man before Jesus. The others in the course of their research got in the way.

We need to consider to which group we belong. Where you stand determines what you see. Those people sitting around Jesus had a different agenda. Their lack of engagement with the situation around them meant their research was not helping. It is possible for our agendas to become so important that they actually get in the way of the very people we want to help.

Research Happens in Engagement

The most significant piece of research that I have been in was as part of a team of youth workers involved in an inner city community on a public housing estate. We brought in a whole team of Christians once a week to run youth clubs. These helpers came from the suburbs, were reasonably well educated and with the very best intentions they came to help in a ministry among young people in an inner city area.

After quite a long time we wondered why no one was interested in becoming a Christian. We decided to ask - to research if you like - why this was so. The fact that we had to make that loop of thought says something about what our agenda was.

Going up to a couple of young people we said, "Hey, Karen, we're wondering what you think of Christians?" To our surprise she said, "We think Christians are great people. We think you're really good people. The way you come each week, especially the way we treat you, is amazing." And that is true, they treated us pretty badly at times! So to the next step. "Would you ever consider becoming a Christian?" At this point Karen's face dropped a little and she said, "No, I could never do that, I'm not good enough." That was a piece of research which came right from the heart of our engagement with those young people, and it actually changed our whole ministry.

Wise Research Can Change Our Ministry

That girl's remark turned upside down the programme we were running and we set about doing things in quite different ways with a new vision for what we were doing.

Very often our agenda is our institutional agenda, what the church wants, or what the mission agency wants, or how can we market our mission group. Do we have the strength to follow wise research to the point where it changes our whole agenda and turns it on its head?

Research by Participant Observation

The second story, in Acts 10, is another well known one, about Peter and Cornelius. This is an incredibly exciting story of conversion, growth, research and transformation. As an Australian I want to apply this as a key story for the Church there.

The story of Peter and Cornelius is the story of the Gospel leaping a cultural barrier - that it is not just for Jews but for all people. We need to hear that and learn from it. The Church in Australia is culturally captive to certain social economic groups,

age groups and interest groups. There are mission frontiers in our own back yards. What we desperately need is for the Gospel to leap these cultural barriers.

This is a discovery - the Gospel is for *all*. Peter goes to the house of Cornelius and the people there are converted. The Gospel has leapt an incredible cultural divide. Peter has made a critical discovery about his faith.

In Acts 10:34 Peter says, "I now realise that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what race he belongs to."

Open to Move in New Directions

It was Peter's commitment to the Kingdom, his openness to hear, that made that discovery possible. He took a bold and scary set of risks. He had a strange dream and he tried to understand what it meant. While that was happening he heard some people outside, who called him to come with them and he had to decide whether to go.

Open to Learning

Peter came to the experience with Cornelius wide open to the possibility that God might show him something completely different to what had been accepted wisdom. Wise researchers will be open to that as we crunch data or reflect on what is happening. We must be earthed enough to people, and what is going on around us, to hear. Wise research is not placid, it involves taking risks and moving in new directions.

Open to the Holy Spirit

Peter followed God's leading and followed the Holy Spirit in the whole process. Right at the beginning, after he had his dream, Peter was trying to understand what the vision meant. In v 19 the Spirit said, "'Listen! Three men are here looking for you... so get ready and go down and do not hesitate to go with them.' So Peter went down."

Open to the Holy Spirit, open to God's leading. That's easy to say, but what does that actually mean in your life and in the ministry you are part of now? For Peter that meant some really scary steps forward.

In my research would I be open to discovering that some theory I held and cherished might be wrong or irrelevant or might be a back eddy in terms of Kingdom values? Or that our plan for helping churches in Australia to be more effective was somehow inappropriate. Or our plan for evangelising the whole world was somehow not right. Are we open to that? We need to be open in order to discover what God's Spirit is leading us to.

One of the incredible things in this story is that the point at which the Gospel leaps one of the most significant barriers of the time is also the point at which the Church is opened up to a massive transformation.

Open to Transformation

The conversion of Cornelius and his household leads to a point of transformation, and not only for Peter. The Church is challenged to its core as to what it believes in a very significant area, the area of circumcision.

v 45. "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles." They are asking whether circumcision is a Gospel imperative for all believers, or at least half of them! - or is it a cultural expression that is right for one group and not for another?

Maybe with 2,000 years of history we don't understand the incredible significance of that, but this is a major issue for them to deal with.

The Church had to wrestle with this issue and wrestle with what God was saying to them about this new piece of information and this new issue. In that context the Church discovered new directions and new ways forward.

A Wise Researcher is Not A Lone Ranger

Another aspect is that after he left Cornelius, Peter went straight back to the Church, to his peers, and said, "Let's pray together and reflect on this".

Wise researchers are not going to be lone rangers. They are not going to be empire builders out there on their own. They are going to be bonded into a community into which their discoveries and reflections can be worked through prayerfully.

Accountability

In our research are we bonded into a group of people to which we can be held accountable? I mean costly accountability, not just pats on the back, because research is a risky adventure. Not knowing the destination, we embark on the journey and in the process we need strong support, we need not to be out on our own, we need to be accountable in God's strength.

We can expect that if we are being wise researchers we might be massively transformed. Scared? You should be.

Researchers Are Artists

Some years ago our National Church Life Survey (NCLS) team in Australia sat down and cleared up the database of attenders, getting everything on one software package. Then we looked at what we had and stopped and reflected as a team. And the way we imagined our data was as a giant block of stone that needed to be crafted and chiselled to discover the image that God had placed in it.

I would argue that researchers are artists and I hope and pray that we have analysed well. I hope and pray that we have brought our real world experience, and engagement in the mission of the Church, to the task of looking at the information.

I hope and pray that we have brought our passion for the Kingdom to that data, not just our desire to build the NCLS or even to build the Uniting Church, or the Anglican church, or

the Pentecostal churches, or whatever we are part of, but building the Kingdom. I hope and pray that we have brought a willingness to be surprised.

I hope and pray that we have valued the insight of each other on the team and other people in the Church in Australia and worldwide who have contributed to our reflection on that material.

And I hope and pray that we have chiselled the stone in that database in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

It's a risky business, a scary process and a very fulfilling process.

Prayer

I invite you to spend a moment silently reflecting on the particular sense of call you have and the concerns that you are focused on in your ministry.

I invite you to spend a few moments praying for the people for whom you have a burden and a concern. To step into their shoes and understand and reflect on where they are at.

Perhaps you might like to reflect on the most significant points of learning in your life, what you learnt and how you have learnt it, and thank God for it.

Lord God, we thank you for the privilege of serving you. We thank you for the possibility of discovery. We thank you that you can use us, no matter what our technical competences or skills might be in the task of critical research and reflections on what you would have us do. We thank you that we need each other to discover direction and your will.

We pray for a Kingdom perspective, that we may be open to furthering the Kingdom, not just the organisations or institutions that we work for.

May our heart be for the people we wish to serve. And may our strength and discernment and willingness to be bold risk takers come from the strength of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Help us to find holes in roofs and not just sit in circles around you.

Amen.

STUDY 4

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF RESEARCH **- summarised extracts¹** **from a paper by Dr Arnold van Heusden**

Art, music, literature and research all invite you to pay attention: pay attention to what is in this frame. Stop, look and listen to the particularities of this moment, of this person, of this incident, of this anecdote. It is what Jesus invites us to do - to see the life behind the eyes of the neighbour, to see the situation. "Consider the lilies"

Theology can be thought of in two ways: as a complete system - systematic theology, or with a modular approach - building blocks constructing a generative theology.

Systematic Theology

Systematic theology is the complete catalogue of, say, Aquinas, Calvin, Barth and so on. The period of the Enlightenment said the theology is all there but recognised the validity of reason and of rational thinking and said:

are we looking at it the right way?
are we seeing what is really there?
are we seeing it because it was really like that?

As a result, lower and higher criticism of biblical material developed.

Modular Theology

This is the theology of:

women
blacks
poor
research

Post modernity has a distrust of meta-narratives, of total systems and ideologies. Similarly, post modernity distrusts comprehensive stories with no moment of surprise, stories

which are repeated because they are holy scripture but when no intuition is applied, and there is no fresh insight. Post moderns have a love of the life story and the anecdote where meaning is shared between story-teller and listener.

Which Approach?

Which is appropriate for research - systematic or modular theology? Let us look at some of the dominant images and metaphors of various books of the Old Testament.

Genesis

Genesis is about nomads and wanderers. Abraham gains new information by going into new situations, by exploring the unknown in response to the call of God. What emerges is the view of the outsider, not the owner. The look from outside into inside is very different from the perception inside.

Exodus

Exodus is about slaves and warriors. It is about the underdog. The camera's view from a dog's level is very different from the human adult, similarly the view from a child's level. Even as liberated slaves and as nascent warriors the view is from a lowly position. It is a threatening position from which to base one's perceptions.

Joshua, Judges & Samuel

These books are about soldiers and settlers, an ownership approach with a new pride and identity. They describe the struggle between isolationists and integrationists. In holistic societies the gods are an integral part of life, so the question is what about the gods that go with the new technology and learning and sophistication of the surrounding peoples and the God of the Israelites?

Understanding the Images

The images are not in themselves authoritative but they give hints of the different perspectives possible: the way I look at things is not necessarily the only way possible.

From the situation people are in they may view things very differently. So what is the position or the angle we want to research from?

The Meaning for Researchers

The subject matter for research for Christians needs to include many aspects of the world and of culture as well as church and mission. Both the church and the world need to be included, not the one over the other and not the one to the exclusion of the other.

It is obvious not everything can be researched. If you want a real interface between people as they are in church and as they are in the rest of life, it is not enough to have internal church statistics. Similarly if you want a holistic approach to the problems most people are facing, it is not enough to look at Census statistics.

Do we want quantity or quality or both? If you have quantity alone you can get mass without meaning. Extrapolating meaning from the size of the mass is very hard to do. If you have quality alone you may have meaning but no perspective. The results are anecdotal. Quantity followed by a quality survey gives an in-depth view and also a broad data base.

Is the technique to be open or closed? It is important to avoid manipulation of those being researched and obscurantism on the part of those doing the research. There is a danger of becoming so specialised the findings are not understood and not seen to be relevant.

If research is on the interface between church and world, the researcher needs to have real contacts in the world that have nothing to do with the church agenda of mission and evangelism.

There is beauty and culture and relationships that do not point directly to accepting or rejecting Jesus. Music, art, reading, creative writing, spending time with family and friends, having

fun are all a great help in relaxing and providing an important counter to high tension as well as giving different perspectives on research.

I plead with you to be as open and transparent as possible and so to help people work with you wholeheartedly within an open system.

¹Abridged from an article by Rev Lorraine Francis, Christian Research Association, New Zealand.

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