



## 6 Studies for small groups



**Redcliffe Uniting Church**  
*At the Heart of the Peninsula*



# Becoming Us

6 Small Group Studies to enable  
Redcliffe Uniting Church  
to go forward into God's future

By Fritz Venzke & Paul Clark



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# Introduction

There was a time when I was doing my personal devotional, reading and meditating on the story of Jesus calming the storm.

We read in Mark 4:35-41 where the disciples are struggling against a storm, fearing for their lives. Although Jesus is present, he is asleep! Feeling abandoned by their leader, they woke Jesus and in a backhanded way ask for his help, 'Don't you care if we drown?'

Jesus calms the storm and asks the disciples, '*Where is your faith*' in that moment I felt the Lord give me three words, '*in each other*?' Now, I know these are **not** the words in the scripture, and Jesus was asking where their faith was in God, but it made an impression on me.

Did they have faith in one another, as a first step? Were they working together against the storm? Had some given up, while others were paddling?

The storms of life will come. In Australia we are facing a raging storm as secularism seeks to blow Christianity from the public sphere. It can be terrifying. I see we need two things;

- **Desperate trust in God** – Jesus can overcome in his sleep, he's got this. It's going to be OK.
- **To work together** – to paddle as a team.

This study seeks to help us paddle as a team, and deepen our trust in God. God still saves souls. God still heals hearts. In the words of scripture are methods we can trust. But we all need to seek them together. Seek a Kingdom culture that will see lives transformed.

I commend these studies to you.

Paul Clark

# The Structure

In this bible study, after week 1, we'll explore two well-known stories from the bible: one of them spanning only one chapter in the New Testament and the other spanning multiple chapters, years and settings in the Old Testament.

Each story will help us to better understand our own faith. Using Redcliffe UC's structure of *Welcome, Experience, Belong, Believe, Become*, we'll see how the New Testament story in John 4 of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well is representative of God's bigger story with us, a story wherein He is always challenging our expectations of community.

The grey box gives an opportunity for further personal or group exploration and interaction with the broader life of the church at RUC – this is the story that we'll read, contemplate and explore during Sunday services every week. The questions we ask ourselves will be more personal and immediate. This is the story of Jacob in the middle of Genesis, from his feeling of alienation from God (and family), to his marriage, his independence, his wrestle with God at the Jabbok river and his eventual reconciliation with his brother Esau, whom he betrayed.

This is where we will be exploring what it means to become like God's other son, Jacob. And as we'll see, this doesn't mean doing the things he does, but getting to know our dependence on God the way Jacob did. Here, we'll use the same four questions every week (in the tradition of the contemplative church) to explore God, ourselves and the nature of the story.

What we hope happens is that these two stories show us, in their unique ways, how God is always found in places, with people, doing things we don't expect. We affirm that He does the same in our lives.

Fritz Venzke



# Week 1: The Vision

**Aim:** To paint a picture of how the vision for the Redcliffe Uniting Community Space enables us to live the Mission of God.

**Share** with one another why you are part of the life of Redcliffe Uniting Church.

**Read** Matthew 28:16-20

In Matthew's gospel the resurrected Jesus gathers his disciples on a mountain and gave them their last command.

- What challenges you about this passage?
  
- What excites you about this passage?
  
- What brings you comfort in this passage?
  
- How well do you think you live out this command?

One of the comforting things about this passage is that it was given to a **community** not just an individual. We bear the responsibility together! In fact, the best way to live out this vision is as a community. To understand we are inviting individuals to follow Christ in community!

Consider this passage together.... **Acts 2:42-47**

The above is a summary of life in the very early church.

- What excites you in the passage?
- What challenges you in that description of the early church?
- How is Redcliffe Uniting like that description?
- How could we be more like that description?

Did you notice that it was the quality of their fellowship, the depth of their spirituality, their generosity and compassion that drew people in?

We know the early church took Jesus' call to '**Go** into the world' and share the good news seriously, what gave their preaching power was the depth of their fellowship, spirituality and compassion.

Redcliffe Uniting aims to be ***at the heart of the Peninsula***. That is 'to be a Church who are God's blessing to our city such that people are brought into a transforming relationship with God.'

Our future *Community Services Space* brings Community Service providers onto our property, so we can partner in whole of life transformation to our community.

- How does our *Community Services Space* bring together the Matt 28 and Acts 2 passage?

- What is going to be essential for its success as a mission of God?

A humbling reality is that Jesus left earth and left God's mission in our trembling hands! The good news is that He is still with us, and we have one another! As a church we have sought to respond to the needs of our community in a way that makes *showing* the gospel easier. We partner with those who share our vision for a compassionate community, then we live the gospel with them. **Spend some time praying for this vision!**

## For Further/Personal Reflection

Mission is not something you travel halfway across the world to do, thinking that you need to 'take' the gospel to people who need Jesus. Mission is actually *going to where God already is* and where He is calling us to be his hands and feet! In the geographical and socio-economic realities of the Redcliffe Peninsula, we are sure that God's mission for us is to create a place, like the well in Samaria in John 4, where people from all walks of life can come to be welcomed, to experience something of God. To decide to walk the road of belonging, believing and becoming with us!

Types of questions that help us to understand our vision:

- **What** is the Mission of God?
- **How** does that look in Redcliffe?
- **Whose** job is the mission?
- **Why** should we care about our community in Redcliffe?
- **How** does the HUB enable us to make our vision a reality?

# Week 2 - Welcome: John 4:1-9

**Aim:** To arrive at tangible expressions of what a welcoming community looks like, based on scripture.

**Share:** Can you remember a group or place that you belonged to, that made you feel truly welcome? Share the things that the group 'got right' in making you feel welcome.

- If you were an interior designer for a day and you had to design a welcoming community space, what are the three most important things you would add to the design?

**Read** the first part of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, John 4:1-9

*Jesus is a powerful, well-known preacher. He is also a Jewish man. His ethnicity, his gender and his reputation (status) turn his meeting with the woman at the well into a remarkable encounter. By common practice, their two worlds should never meet.*

*Noon was not the usual time to draw water. It seems like this lady was not even respected by her own community.*

Because of geographical, ethnic and religious differences, there were many reasons why the Jews and Samaritans wanted nothing to do with each other.

- Can you think of similar, modern occasions where groups of people are not expected to interact? Think along the lines of income, colour, culture, education, religion.

- How simple yet radical was Jesus' welcome?
- Has anyone even shown you such simple grace? Share that experience. What did it mean to you?
- How did the woman respond?
- How can RUC be a welcoming place for people who might not feel welcome in their homes, schools or places of employment?
- Can you think of 5 specific behaviours you could do that would make RUC a welcoming community for all?
- Try to think of 5 behaviours to avoid if we want to be a welcoming community.

Your group might want to make a poster or list of 5 welcoming behaviours they can encourage one another to adopt, and to keep each other accountable to avoid unwelcoming behaviour!  
Pray about this!

## God's other son: Genesis 28:10-22

Read the story of Jacob's dream in Genesis 28:10-22. You might want to spend some time reading the preceding story as well to better understand what happens in this one. See in this story God's gracious 'welcome' to the deceptive Jacob.

- Read the story attentively. What words or phrases hold your attention? Why?
- What is characteristic of God in this story? In what ways are you encouraged, or challenged, by God's behaviour?
- What do you learn about yourself? What in Jacob's behaviour is typical of humankind?
- Does this story comfort, or confront you? Why?

## Week 3 - Experience: John 4:7-19

**Aim:** To arrive at tangible expressions of actions we could do to ensure people in our orbit have experiences of God.

**Share:** Can you think of a time when you had an experience of God, profound or ordinary? Share that story.

[OR] When have you experienced God through the actions of someone else? Share that story.

*Jesus sits down with a Samaritan woman at a well and asks for some water. This turns out to be the pivotal experience that leads to many Samaritans being converted and following Jesus. Sometimes our experiences of God are profound, crystal-clear, even supernatural. And sometimes they can be, or start out as, very ordinary experiences. We are often unprepared for such experiences!*

**Read** the next part of our story slowly, John 4:7-19

- What do you think would have been going through the Samaritan woman's mind when Jesus promised her that He could give her life-giving water?

- What would be going through your own mind if someone you didn't know, from a different social/racial/religious background to your own, promised you such a thing?

- How do visitors to our property feel when they hear our strange promises about faith?

Whether we consider ourselves 'good' or 'prepared' enough, this is what life in the body of Christ boils down to: ***we believe that we have been given the life-giving water and we want to share it with others who we believe are thirsty for eternal life.***

Comment on the above – do we *want* to share our faith? Why/why not?

What barriers stop you sharing your faith?

When have you been able to share your faith in the past?

Jesus didn't just share this news with this woman with *words*, but by his actions/attitude/behaviour. How? Consider v7-9 and v18

It's interesting to reflect on verse 18. How do you hear Jesus' statement? Is it harsh or compassionate? Why do you think that?

We don't know the tone Jesus used in V18 but her reaction draws us to conclude that Jesus was being compassionate. Rather than she being the guilty one who can't keep a husband, she is the victim of men who toss her away (remember in their culture men could divorce a wife for burning dinner). Woman relied on men for their livelihood. She has been mistreated constantly by men her whole life, and the current one is using her, won't even marry her. Everyone, even her community has rejected her, not Jesus. He acknowledges her suffering. He sees into her circumstances, and she concludes he is a prophet.

- Have you even seen this in the story before?

It can be difficult to have the right words to share our faith, but we share our faith loudly and clearly through our actions, attitudes and behaviours without even realising. Giving people an experience of God.

- When you come onto the church property, what things enable you to experience God? What things stop you experiencing God?

- Moving from Welcome to Experience, what are 5 things you could do that would enable people to experience God at RUC?

- On the other hand, what are 5 behaviours, actions or customs to avoid if we want people to experience God through RUC?

In the story of John 4, as in all of church life, so much of what people experience of God starts out in normal, everyday interaction with ordinary people. And it's surprising how often the basic act of **genuinely listening** to others is the gateway to them experiencing God! If you really listen to people you can help them see things they can't see, you can help them see God at work in their lives. Jesus in this story is talking at a deeper level, inviting her in.

Here is an acronym that could be helpful in learning to listen. Talk it through as a group.

**C**onnect – give eye contact, be interested, ask open questions.

**U**nderstand – Seek to understand someone's background/ position  
[no-one cares what you know till they know that you care.]  
reframe what they said, check what you heard

**R**espond – after you have understood, then respond, express empathy, tell your story. How would God respond?

**E**xplore – Explore people's story. 'How did that make you feel? Why did you do that? Why do you think that happened? Where was God?'

**Give it a go!** Pair up and take it in turns to speak, and listen [or offer a CURE!]. It is very hard but very powerful. Then pray for one another.

## God's other son: Genesis 29:1-30

Read Genesis 29:1-30, the story of Jacob's labour on his uncle's farm and his uncle's deceit. How was Jacob *experiencing* God's favour, perhaps without even noticing?

- Read the story attentively. What words or phrases hold your attention? Why?
- What is characteristic of God in this story? In what ways are you encouraged, or challenged, by God's behaviour?
- What do you learn about yourself? What in Jacob's behaviour is typical of humankind? Do you miss God at work in your life?
- Does this story comfort, or confront you? Why?

## Week 4 - Belong: John 4:20-24

**Aim:** To arrive at tangible expressions of what a belonging community looks and feels like, based on Scripture.

*Feeling like you belong is different to feeling welcome. A welcome is introductory and limited in its scope. Feeling that you belong runs deeper, it is the notion that you do not just 'feel at home' somewhere, but that a place and the people in it represent you and you represent them.*

- **Share** a story of a community you really feel/felt like you belong/belonged to. What was the thing that made you feel like you belonged in that community?

- **Share** a story of a time you were made to feel you didn't belong? What are the things that sent a message that you didn't belong?

**Read** the next part of John 4, verses 17-26

Our story takes a new direction. No longer is Jesus speaking in terms of water, and no longer is he only speaking to the Samaritan woman, now he speaks to her as a representative of her people about the true and proper way of worshipping the Father! [Her, a representative of the people!?]

It's difficult to overstate the importance of what Jesus does: He discloses information about the Kingdom of God to a Samaritan woman who is not welcomed by her own community. He empowers her with his words and makes her an ambassador who goes back to her city and

calls the people to Jesus! **As we'll see in the next study, all this Jesus shared with her before she is even sure if she believes in Him!**

- Jesus was treating her as an equal, engaging her in Spiritual teaching [that was men's domain], a representative of her people, *and he knew her shameful story!* Describe how this lady may have felt?

- What is the 'G' word Jesus is pouring over her?

- Yes, Grace. Something changes within you when you are shown grace [if you are not hard-of-heart!] Sit for a moment and reflect, feel that change within of being accepted, valued, elevated.

Grace is the door to belonging. Not everyone enters the door, but Jesus offers it to all!

- What was the woman's reaction to Jesus? [Read v28-29]

- She had come to collect water [she leaves her bucket!], what had she found instead?

She now belonged to something she couldn't even describe, and so she becomes part of Jesus' team! **When you belong, you have skin in the game.** When you belong, the success of the whole depends in some small way on you.

It's interesting to see; we all want to belong, we all want to *feel* like we belong, but your feelings of belonging are dependent on your actions. The more you invest in a group, the more you'll belong!

If you want to belong should you;	be served	serve?
	give	take?
	volunteer	sit back?
	observe	participate?
	sacrifice	hold back

- Can you think of 5 ways that we can make people feel that they belong to our community before they believe?

- Can you think of 5 things to avoid if we want people to belong?

- One caveat. Jesus wasn't always sweetness & joy. He could be quite direct and challenging. Who was one people group Jesus challenged, and why?

To outsiders, those who didn't know better, Jesus was open arms. To those who should have known better, Jesus challenged to be better. Jesus takes anyone willing into his team, but as a team member we follow the coach, he knows the way! [See Matt 22:1-14.]

We have to be careful in our church-life that the ones who feel that they belong don't close themselves off from those trying to 'get in'!

### *The paradox of close or closed*

It's no coincidence that the words close and closed are so close! Things that make a group close, close us off to others. Things like *in-jokes*. *Group language*. *Informal invites that forget new folk*.

There's a paradox here. For a group to thrive it needs to hive. It needs to become close, involved, enmeshed, empathetic. But too close is bad. Closed systems die.

Every biological system needs a regular influx of new people or information.

How do groups, churches, clubs, workplaces walk this narrow road? Become close enough to be more than the sum of its parts, but open enough to let new life in?

Every member needs to have one eye looking for new folk, and ensure they get invited, listened to, enfolded, enmeshed.

**How do we become close, but not closed?**

# God's other son: Genesis 31

Read the story of Jacob's deceit of his uncle Laban in Genesis 31.

Jacob enjoys the Lord's favour, even if (by our standards) he does not always act morally. This says more about God than about us! God has us Belong before we believe or behave correctly!

- Read the story attentively. What words or phrases hold your attention? Why?
- What is characteristic of God in this story? In what ways are you encouraged, or challenged, by God's behaviour?
- What do you learn about yourself? What in Jacob's behaviour is typical of humankind?
- Does this story comfort, or confront you? Why?

# Week 5 - Believe: John 4:25-29

**Aim:** To explore the Gospel and give people a chance to 'believe'.

**Share:** Share with one another how you became 'believers'.

- Are there any common threads to your stories? What came before, after? Who was involved? Common emotions?

**Read** John 4:25-41

- Jesus makes an astonishing revelation to this foreign female [v26]. Remember, Jesus had been keeping this a secret from just about everyone & telling the disciples to keep it quiet. Why does he tell her? [consider 34-38]

- Does she believe it? How can you tell?

A man walked up to an Amish farmer and asked, 'Are you a Christian?' to which the man replied, 'You'd have to ask my neighbour?'

- What Biblical truth does this joke reveal?

- We often think of *belief* as intellectual ascent, but the biblical word is better rendered *trust*. Trust is a quality you have toward *someone*. It results in changed behaviour. It's easy for us to say we believe, but our actions reveal our true beliefs.

- How do the lady's actions reveal her belief?

- What do your actions reveal about your beliefs?

Belief is not about certainty. The Samaritan woman was not without her reservations. V29 – *'could he possibly be the Messiah?'*

- What are some of the things in the life of faith that you have had reservations about?

- Do you still have them, or how have they been resolved in your life?

Because Jesus has shown the Samaritan woman that she belongs, she begins to believe. And nothing that the disciples say can change that! While they are criticising her gender and background, she goes into town, not to fetch her husband, but to tell everyone of the man she met at the well – the Messiah!

- Why is Jesus being the Messiah such a radical/important idea?

To put it very simply, the Messiah was the one who was going to show people the way back to God. To restore a time when God would be King. They thought this might be a physical earthly reality [A Godly King on a throne] but Jesus showed it was an individual reality – people living with God as the King of their lives, which leads to eternal life.

- Would you say you have made God the King of your life? [God's opinions determine your lifestyle, your values, your decisions, your behaviour and attitude.]. Why/why not?

- Are there areas of your life that you haven't given over to God?

- Would you like to yield your life, or another part of your life to God? If so, ask the leader to prayer with you to do that now.

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If belonging is about having skin in the game, believing is about having dust on your feet [Isaiah 52:7].

- The act of going and telling others of what we believe is central to this story. Can you think of 3 ways that enable us to tell others of what we believe?

- How will the Hub enable us to show & tell others of what we believe?

For us, belonging and believing are intertwined. To affirm that you belong and to encourage you to show others what you believe, you can use this prayer every morning:



## **OUR MORNING PRAYER**

**GOOD MORNING LORD, THANK YOU  
FOR...**

**SHOW ME SOMEONE I CAN HELP  
TODAY**

**SHOW ME SOMEONE I CAN SHARE  
YOU WITH TODAY**

**BE WITH ME TODAY AS I FACE ...**



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## God's other son: Genesis 32:22-32

Read Genesis 32:22-32, the story of Jacob wrestling with a man until daybreak, then declaring, 'I have wrestled with God.' In this story God goes from being '*the God of my Fathers*' to '*my God*'. Jacob believes. Have you had your wrestle with God to belief?

- Read the story attentively. What words or phrases hold your attention? Why?
- What is characteristic of God in this story? In what ways are you encouraged, or challenged, by God's behaviour?
- What do you learn about yourself? What in Jacob's behaviour is typical of humankind?
- Does this story comfort, or confront you? Why?

# Week 6 - Become: John 4:39-43

**Aim:** To understand that the Christian faith is not a point in time decision, but a long following in the same direction [sanctification].

**Share:** Have you experienced change in your life, when you transformed in a particular behaviour or attitude? How did this happen? Was it a sudden change, or a long journey?

**Read** the last part of the story in John 4:39-43

The lady goes from zero to hero in this story, founder of the Samaritan church – it is sad that her name was never recorded, maybe the disciples at this early stage didn't want to know!

- How do you think this story, and the reaction of her townsfolk would have changed this lady?

- Do you think she was ever at the mercy of an abusive man again?

- We don't know her story, but I find it easy to understand that having seen the vision of who she could be in Jesus' eyes and words, she became that. A leader in her community. No longer taken advantage of. No longer ashamed. It is the story of Jesus' disciples. Jesus saw a Rock in Peter, and that's what he became. What do you think of this theory?

This was not the end, but the beginning of her story. Like a romantic movie, the action focuses on the 'falling in love' [coming to faith], but then there is a lifetime of marriage afterwards – with all its ups and downs, challenges and joys.

In recent history Christianity has focussed on the 'falling in love' – conversion, believing. That 'being saved for heaven' is the end point rather than the beginning point of faith. It has led to a church that is seen as smug and uncaring towards the world.

Jesus always called people to a journey of Christ-likeness. They were disciples, following him.

- How can a church 'stuck in a rut' become a turn off to the world?

- How can a Christian stuck-in-a-rut turn off their friends?

- Are you stuck? How can you move forward in your faith life? Will you?

The Samaritan woman exercises her belief, goes into town and begins to tell others about Jesus, they interact with him themselves and many are saved! **But Jesus only stays with them for two days.** Then He moves to the next place where people are waiting to be transformed.

Remember what we said at the beginning of this study: Mission is about going to where God already is and where He is calling us. It's about becoming faithful followers of Christ, not just faithful house sitters. *Welcome, Experience, Belong and Believe* must lead to a greater *Becoming*.

Jesus is always on the move. Are you ready to move with Him?

- Try and think of one way in which you can get out of your comfort zone in faith and begin the sanctification of your own life;
- What are the things that hold believers, and you, back from *Becoming* who God wants you to be?

## God's other son: Genesis 33

After everything Jacob has been through, this is the moment of truth. For better or for worse, Jacob goes to meet his brother, Esau, and the story (almost) comes full circle. Jacob, in this story, becomes a better man.

- Read the story attentively. What words or phrases hold your attention? Why?
- What is characteristic of God in this story? In what ways are you encouraged, or challenged, by God's behaviour?
- What do you learn about yourself? What in Jacob's behaviour is typical of humankind?
- Does this story comfort, or confront you? Why?

## EXTRA NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.









