

## Things Consider

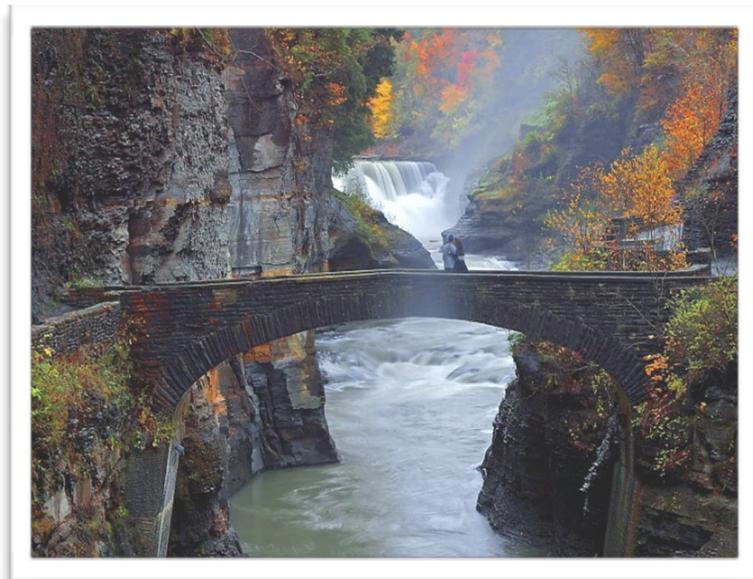
- As I have said, we begin by listening to God, **seeking first His Kingdom**. There is a constant temptation for us to think that we are doing 'this' for God whatever 'this' is. In fact, it is always the other way around – God is reaching out to us and all we can ever do is respond to His initiative. (1 John 4.10)
- I don't believe it has ever been easy to listen to God. We only need to look at our Scriptures and the struggle the Jews had to see the truth in this. However, I do believe that possibly, it is more difficult in our age than in any previous generation. The reason for this is consumerism and the proliferation of entertainment.
- We live in an age of 'retail therapy' and with the overwhelming variety of forms of entertainment, we can successfully not only avoid God, but we can avoid facing any of the deeper questions of life and our own life in particular. In this sense, we are an addicted Society and many, if not most of us, are obsessively compulsive in some way.
- The first step is to limit ourselves with regard to these things. Painful as it will be, to some extent, we need to withdraw from this. Regular times of silence and solitude are critically essential. Then we will discover our own emptiness and the space that can only be filled by God. Critically, we can ask God to help us.
- As we listen to and wait on God, when we are ready, He will begin to show us what we must do next concerning matters that relate specifically to our life. It will take a lifetime.
- As we begin to take this seriously and sort out our life, we will begin to discover the truth of Jesus' words and those who came before Him, which is we are to **love our neighbour** (Matthew 22.36-40). The specifically Christian word here is *agape* which means doing what is best for the other person without asking and expecting anything in return. Unfortunately, parallel with this, we will come to realise just how selfish and self-centred we are. (In reality, this is God blessing us as our illusions are being stripped away). These can be painful lessons.
- **Issues of justice**, if not previously, they will start to become important in our life. In answer to the lawyer's question, 'Who is my neighbour?' (Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10.29-37]), like the lawyer, we will come to discover that anyone in need is our neighbour. This will involve time, money, a listening ear, practical help and no doubt a host of other things at different times. Above all, it will mean a deeper listening within our heart for what is the true need in a particular situation.
- We are on the way to 'walking our talk'.

AtG/B15/MBH

# Attending to God

## 'Walking our Talk'

### Part One



**In his book, *Vanishing Grace*** Philip Yancey tells about a poll of college students who were asked to write the first thing that came to mind when they heard the word 'Christianity'. The most common answer was 'People who don't practice what they preach'. From other studies, it would also seem that a good many adults view Christians in the same way.

**In that book,** Yancey also tells of a survey done by the Barna Group that confirmed this result in that it found little or no difference between Christians and non-Christians with regard to questionable behaviour. To the same extent, both groups were as likely to engage in it. These results pertain to the United States, but I think if the surveys were undertaken here in Australia, it would approximate.

**It would seem to many people** in the wider community that we Christians are not seen as being those who, to use jargon, 'walk our talk'. In saying this, I am not saying whether I believe this to be true or not. I simply observe that this is how a good many people in the wider community perceive us.

**I suggest something** that may seem obvious to you, although judging by what I have just written may not be as obvious to numbers of Christians: Our inner spiritual life must match the way we live outwardly, and vice-versa. What goes on internally needs to find expression in a lifestyle that matches it. Summed up, as a Christian, there needs to be an authenticity about us. (Matthew 5.16; Luke 11.33-36; 1 John 1.5-7)

**The photo on the front** shows a beautiful stone bridge. What enables the couple to stand safely in the centre are the solid foundations at either side with the arch in the middle. If you like, this is a metaphor for living life as a Christian. You may be able to think of other ways of describing it.

**The stone bridge is Jesus Christ.** On one side is our inner life and on the other our outer life. The two are intimately connected in Jesus. Both are needed and if one is weak or non-existent in any way, it will affect the other and thus the whole. Only when both foundations are strong and in their proper places, can we safely stand in the middle. Only then can there be that sense of authenticity that shines through our life. (Matthew 7.24-27; 2 Corinthians 5.17-18; Ephesians 3.16-19; 4.1-3; Colossians 3.1-17)

**Another way of putting this** is to say that our outer life must flow from our inner life. (Matthew 6.22-24; 7.17-20) Outwardly, we are to be like a stained

glass window when the sun shines through, brilliantly lighting it. In looking at it, we know that the brilliance is not due to the actual window, but from the sun behind. Our outer life should closely reflect our inner life. To push this metaphor differently: You and I are not the light, but we are 'to be aglow with the Spirit' (RSV Romans 12.11) shining through our life.

**In other Brochures,** I have looked at practical ways in which we can live out and deepen our relationship with God. I do not wish to repeat that but rather to focus on foundations.

**The critical principle** in this is found in Matthew 6.33: 'Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.' The context of this verse is that we should not worry about life's necessities; God knows them and will provide. (In our society, we seem to worry about the luxuries and not the necessities.) We also need to note that the word 'righteousness' can be translated as 'justice'. We are to seek God's justice. Seek first His kingdom and His justice.

**Our starting point then is always God:** What is God saying to me in my situation? What is He whispering in my heart that I need to hear? Where might God be working in 'this', whatever 'this' is, so that I can follow? How might I see God in this other person or situation? Summed up we need to begin by always looking for God in the heart of everyday experience. We need to allow ourselves to be slowly taken over by God's Spirit transforming us. (Romans 8.9-17; 26-27)

**In the Old Testament,** in speaking to his listeners about their rebellion, punishment, and restoration, the prophet Hosea tells them to return to God and 'hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.' (12.6) The prophet Micah also tells the ancient Jews about what is good and what the Lord requires of them: '... but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.' (6.8)

**The keys in all this** are our *waiting on God* and the close connection between *love* and *justice*. When taking these three things seriously we will start to find that we are beginning to 'walk our talk'.

**It will not be easy** for we discover that there is a deep division within us. (Romans 7.19-20) Nevertheless, God 'walks' with us and will never desert us and so we can constantly ask His help. (See Psalm 51.6)