

# “A catalyst is an event or person causing a change

If we ask the questions: ‘What in my life has actually caused me to become like Christ?’ or ‘What has made a real impact in my Christian journey?’ all of us will be able to think of something or someone significant.

I’ve asked many people these questions and common themes come out every time. We could call these catalysts for faith: events or people that cause a change...causing us to become more like Christ.

Over this series we will be looking at 6 common catalysts for faith; what they are, what the Bible says about them and how we can give space for them in our own lives.

Here’s a brief overview of our six catalysts for faith:

## 1. **Practical Teaching:**

This is teaching that moves beyond the theoretical or even theological to something that

initiates and inspires a change of lifestyle. A conviction that brings faith.

## 2. **Private Devotions:**

These are the day to day devotions that feed us, that draw us closer to the heart of God. As we abide, we are changed to become more like Christ and see fruitfulness in our lives.

## 3. **Personal Ministry:**

We are all created for a purpose, part of that expresses itself in how we serve others. By engaging in ministry, we are often shaped by God. It’s in the doing that we can be formed and challenged.

## 4. **Providential Relationships:**

We are not called to the discipleship journey on our own. God places around us those who can inspire, encourage and challenge.

## 5. **Pivotal Circumstances:**

We don’t have control over our circumstances. But how we respond to them can often dramatically shape us and teach us more deeply than simple words. It’s often our wrestling with circumstances that can be a real blessing to others.

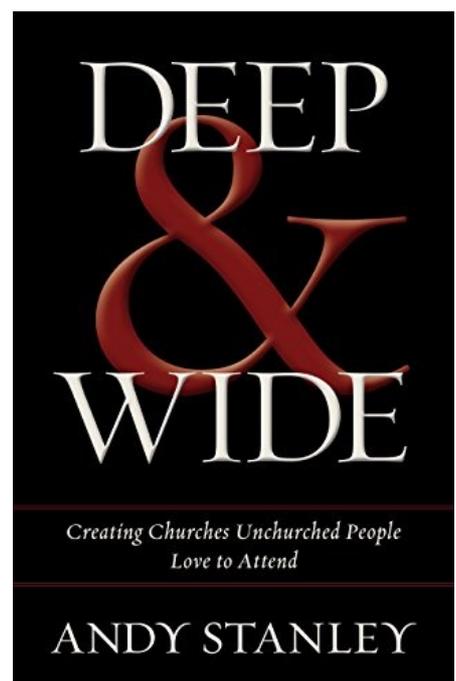
## 6. **Powerful Encounter:**

This may be the moment of meeting God or an experience of the Holy Spirit that has been

instrumental in our journey of faith. For some people this is a ‘revelation’ moment where we realise that God invites us into a relationship with him and has a purpose for our lives.

Often one or two of these have been hugely significant. Some of these we can initiate and create opportunities for, others ‘just happen’. Effective discipleship moves beyond simply delivering a programme of teaching, to creating space, opportunities and an environment where these catalysts can develop.

Andy Stanley writes about 5 of these catalysts in his book ‘*Deep and Wide*’.



## Catalyst: PRACTICAL TEACHING

For all of us the importance of relevant and practical teaching based on eternal truths is foundational to our Christian life.

**READING: *Matthew 7:24-29***

### ***HOW DOES THIS CATALYST WORK?***

- When Christians share about their conversion or their discipleship, they normally reference when they first were exposed to the Bible as the Word of God
- In most people's stories they will talk of someone who made the Bible come alive for them. Jesus taught as one who had authority (see Bible passage above).
- The Bible refers to itself as a key element in the life of Faith. Faith comes by hearing. The Word of God is living and active, sharper than a sword.
- Practical teaching is that which produces a:
  - change of thinking
  - challenge to living
  - commitment to faith
- Teaching at church level is often topic based to make it more helpful, relevant and focussed on what works.

### ***PERSONAL STORY / EXAMPLE***

- Personally, I came to faith through a Bible Study in John's gospel where I realised that either this was true and needed a response or irrelevant. It was seen as true factually (similarly to Alpha) but observably true in my friends' lives.
- Subsequent use of Bible notes and Search the Scriptures Study Guides provide ongoing practical, relevant teaching.
- I also see the value of both a logos (words *about* God) and rhema (words *from* God) approach.

### ***PRACTICAL POINTERS:***

- Sunday teaching - we need to be part of a church where the Bible is respected and taught as relevant to life and the culture
- Daily investment - we need to own the Bible for ourselves and find ways to read and learn from it as a way of both understanding God and hearing God
- LIFEgroup life needs be real and relevant in our use of the Bible rather than an intellectual exercise.
- One another - we can help and encourage each other in our understanding and to hear God. Accountability works well!

## Catalyst: Practical Teaching

### IN - helping a sense of belonging:

What three things would you want to pass on to a new Christian to help them in their daily walk with Jesus?

### UP - hearing from God and growing:

*Read: v 28 and 29*

*...taught as one who had authority*

- Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 to 7 is simple, clear and yet remarkable in its clarity and authority
- Why were the crowds so impressed with this teaching?
- Draw out some simple aspects of the teaching - it was.....
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.

**In groups of 3** - share two truths from the bible that have had a significant impact on you as a disciple.

**Back together** - talk about how your LIFEgroup can make the Bible more relevant, practical and helpful to each other. What changes are needed to make this happen? People? Planning? Preparation?

### OUT - impacting others:

We need to interpret the truth of the Bible to a world without truth! What are the most basic practical truths that the world needs to know and how will you share them? Answers below.

### BIBLE READING:

Matthew 7:24-29

'Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.'

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

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*God loves you and  
God has an amazing  
purpose for your life*

## Catalyst: PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

Faith starts with God and not us. Our own discipleship and faith rests upon our connection to God based on who He is. Prioritising our own private devotions is essential to a life of faith in God.

**READING:** *Matthew 6:5-23*

### HOW DOES THIS CATALYST WORK?

- (v5 & 15) *And when you pray/fast.* Somewhere along the way, Christians begin to pray. Alone. When we submit to God in prayer (maybe with fasting) we tune our hearts to the heart of God. We then hear Him and see some prayers answered and our faith is strengthened. This is not just for the spiritual elite: the sooner we can get even unbelievers reading their Bibles and praying, the better.
- (v16 & 18) *The secret place.* In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus threw in some 'acts of righteousness' to be done in secret. Our heavenly Father sees what we do in secret. God responds to our private acts of righteousness. This fuels our intimacy with God and we train ourselves to be godly.
- (v9-13) *The breadth and depth of prayer.* Let us be careful not to limit what prayer is. It is often much wider and deeper than many of our individual expressions of prayer and praying. The Lord's Prayer reveals at least two priorities in prayer: First, **intimacy** with God expressed in worship, and second **the bringing of His Kingdom to earth.** If something exists in heaven then it is to be loosed on earth: We can pray for (i) our material needs (ii) our personal relationships and (iii) our spiritual state. When the believer prays according to the revealed will of God, faith is specific and focused. Enduring faith grabs hold of that reality and doesn't let go.
- (v21) *Where is your treasure?* Our heart, mind and actions are all linked. Let us treat our

private devotions in the secret place as treasure. As we do this our heart will follow and so further fuel our devotions.

### PERSONAL STORY / EXAMPLES & PRACTICAL POINTERS

There are as many great examples of how to activate our faith through private devotion as there have been people of great faith. Here are a selected few practical examples:

- **Solitude:** This is not simply a matter of 'being alone, but [of] being with God' and 'there are too many reasons not to be alone. Therefore we must begin by carefully planning our solitude.' - *Henri Nouwen*  
'Solitude is one of the deepest disciplines of the spiritual life because it crucifies our need for importance and prominence. Everyone - including ourselves at first - will see our solitude as a waste of good time. We are removed from "where the action is". That, of course, is exactly what we need.' - *Richard J Foster*
- **Sabbath and Soaking:** 'We need to enter into the rest God has prepared for us. We also need to learn how to become a resting place for Him to dwell. We need to become a temple where God is always invited to come and pour His oil into our lives... unless we have a continuous provision of heaven's oil, we will never complete God's full calling. The good news is that at all times, God is ready to pour it freely over all who desire it.' - *Heidi Baker*
- **Study:** 'One of the most natural things we do is think and talk about what is on our hearts. If God's Word is hidden in our hearts, we will speak of it from sunrise to sunset. It will affect all that we do, all that we think, all that happens in our homes, and all that we do publicly. - *Neil Anderson*

## Catalyst: PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

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### IN - *helping a sense of belonging*

- How easy or hard do you find solitude?
- What does 'Bible Study' mean to you?
- When your private devotions are working - what are some of the things/patterns/places/ways of praying which most give life?
- What are the biggest challenges to your own private devotions?

### UP - *Matthew 6:5-23*

Read through the quotes under *Solitude, Sabbath and Soaking* and *Study*.

- Which of these do you most agree/disagree with? What do you understand by the terms 'Sabbath' and 'Soaking'?
- Which lines of the Lord's Prayer most describe your prayers?
- Which lines of the Lord's Prayer would you most like to pay more attention to?
- Why do you think Jesus spoke about fasting in this context? What are the challenges and encouragements for you?
- Name some practical things you might do this week to be storing 'treasure in heaven'

### OUT

- Another practical aspect could be 'Support'. Spend some time blessing each other in prayer.

- Share some specific things that as a group you might commit to praying for by loosing God's will for 'on earth as it is in heaven' for the coming week.

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### BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:5-21

"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. 6 But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

"When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. 8 Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! 9 Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,  
may your name be kept holy.  
May your Kingdom come soon.  
May your will be done on earth,  
as it is in heaven.  
Give us today the food we need,  
and forgive us our sins,  
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.  
And don't let us yield to temptation,  
but rescue us from the evil one.

"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

"And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

## Catalyst: PERSONAL MINISTRY

When people talk about their faith journeys, often they will recall a time when they engaged with some form of personal ministry. This might have been leadership, prayer at work, a mission trip etc. Often the stories are about being thrust into ministry environments almost against their will! This was certainly the case with the disciples.

### READING: Mark 6:30-44

A few verses before this passage the disciples had been sent out by Jesus - they were to go in pairs to preach and pray. As they stepped out they saw God work through them dramatically. But Jesus still wanted to stretch their faith - He had bigger plans!

So here we are... there are literally thousands of people gathered around Jesus. He turns to his disciples and *asks them* to feed these people! What?! That is an IMPOSSIBLE ask. Jesus is asking them to do something they feel they simply CANNOT do... *how do they respond?*

- They looked at the practical options
- They realised they were wholly inadequate
- They questioned the call

#### *What did Jesus do next?*

- He asked them to look at what they *actually* have (even though it was so insignificant and wholly inadequate!)
- He asked them to *bring* it to him
- He used the little they had and *multiplied* it...

### HOW DOES THIS CATALYST WORK?

As we look through the Bible at the kinds of people that God chooses to use, nearly all of them, when they are called, feel they are completely inadequate. Moses, Joshua, Gideon the list goes on, feel they can't do it - but later are commended for their faith.

None of them were called to do an 'easy' job... **easy does not build faith, easy is not a catalyst.** If we feel fully equipped to do the thing God is asking - we've

probably got a limited view of what He wants! This is the very essence of how God works. He chooses the weak, the foolish, the powerless things of the world to 'shame the strong, wise and powerful'

*'Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.'* 1 Cor 1:27

*'But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.'* 2 Cor 12:9

**Faith is grown as we say 'yes' to those things that we cannot do unless God turns up!**

### PERSONAL STORY / EXAMPLE

Called to plant a church with no training... with little resources... having to be completely dependent on God.

### PRACTICAL POINTERS

When Jesus calls us into kingdom ministry (whatever that might be - home, work and church) we often respond in the same way as the disciples:

- We look at the practical options
- We realise we are wholly inadequate
- We question the call

We might think - 'I'm not clever enough. I'm not educated enough. Get somebody else!' However, if we want this catalyst of faith to bring change we:

- Ask God where he wants us
- We respond to his call (knowing we can't do it!)
- We bring the little we have to him as an offering.

### Challenge and Pray:

God where do you want me? What little do I have (spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, experience)? Have you already asked me to do something and I'm holding back?

## Catalyst: Personal Ministry

### IN - helping a sense of belonging...

Have you ever found yourself doing something where you thought: 'This is what I'm made for - this is right up my street!' What was it?

### UP - hearing from God and growing...

Read: Romans 12:1-9

- How does Paul describe worship? What is significant about this? What challenge does this bring to us?
- What are the gifts mentioned?
- How are they to be used?
- What is more important: the gift or the attitude with which it is used? Why?
- What are the consequences of not recognising our gifts, or knowing them but *not* using them?

For many of us we have a desire to serve God in the many diverse areas of our lives, but we can think that we haven't got anything to offer. This is NOT TRUE! God has made us all with a purpose, we simply need to uncover it!

A great tool is to look at our S.H.A.P.E. - God has given us **S**piritual gifts, a **H**ear (a passion or a deep desire), we all have **A**bilities, specific **P**ersonalities (we might be extrovert, contemplative etc) and **E**xperiences (these can be positive or negative). All of these combined form us to fulfil those ministries that God has called us into.

For more info and some very helpful resources see:  
<http://www.cpas.org.uk/advice-and-support/exploring-call/your-shape/>

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### OUT - impacting others...

How can you explore your SHAPE and how can you help one another use theirs? Pray for one another.

### BIBLE READING: Romans 12:1-9 (NIV)

#### *A Living Sacrifice*

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

## Catalyst: PROVIDENTIAL RELATIONSHIP

Two sessions can rightly be paired up. They are PIVOTAL CIRCUMSTANCES and PROVIDENTIAL RELATIONSHIPS (which we are looking at today). Unlike other catalysts we have little control! We can choose to engage with practical teaching or spiritual disciplines. We can choose whether or not to serve with our gifts in ministry. But in a real sense these catalysts 'choose us' and it is very rare to find a faith story where they were not an essential part.

### READING : Hebrews 10: 24-25

What does a **PROVIDENTIAL RELATIONSHIP** look like? Well watch out for these sorts of comments when people tell their stories.....

- 'Then I just met this really kind couple.'
- 'Amazing, but I bumped into an old friend from college.'
- 'A guy at work asked me along to a mens breakfast.'
- 'This person appeared from nowhere just when I needed help.'
- A friend of mine calls them Godincidences.'

So we can define a **Providential Relationship (PR)** as God purposefully bringing people into our lives who will 'do good to us'. This resonates with Romans 8:28.

2 key things make a relationship providential:

1. When we **hear** from God through someone.
2. When we **see** God in someone.

Exploring other characteristics of this catalyst:

- Might initially appear **accidental** or **random**.
- For most of us it has occurred **several** times
- Often at moments of **crisis** or life **changes**
- Might begin with an **intersection** but end up running together
- Sometimes for a **short while** or even a **lifetime**.
- They **promote faith** within us.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

3 critical people at 3 critical moments

- **Mark** at 18 **Living faith**
- **David** at 22 **Life direction, values, inspiration and passion**
- **John** at 28 **Family life, ministry (see Psalm 78 and John 21:15 ff.)**

## PRACTICAL POINTERS

- Take time to **appreciate and be thankful** for your PRs.
- Be intentional about telling others who they are and their significance to you.
- Your story may then become part of others' stories
- Don't try and **programme** these - it doesn't work that way
- ...but do cultivate environments/activities where PRs flourish
- Do everything possible to share life outside of meetings.
- **Pray** and be **sensitive and responsive** to the **Holy Spirit's** leading.
- Take appropriate **risks**.

## CONCLUSION: Hebrews 10

- Let us **consider**.....give it some thought ...don't be casual.
- Let us **spur** one another.....choose to get into each others lives.
- Let us **encourage**.....often begins with injecting courage into another person's life.

## Catalyst: PROVIDENTIAL RELATIONSHIPS

### IN - helping a sense of belonging...

Take time to share the significant 'Godincidences' in our personal faith journeys. Offer space for people to share what were the one or two key relationships in their story.....and why!

### UP - hearing from God and growing...

- Aim is to help us grasp that Providential Relationships have always been key to God's plans for His people.
- Try this mini-quiz of Providential Relationships [not to test bible knowledge or show off!!] but to give a taster for how God has worked before. They're in order from scripture!
  - A & L
  - R & N
  - D & J
  - E & E
  - D & S & M & A
  - J & M & L & M
  - P & P & A
  - And finally P & T & E ...have a look together at the passage and identify what characterises these relationships and could encourage us.

### OUT - impacting others...

Freshen up your personal testimony especially to include significant others that have impacted you.

- Ask God for a completely new situation to share that with.
  - Are there ways God might change you to make you more 'approachable' for those needing help or exploring faith?

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### BIBLE READING: Philippians 2:19-26

If the Lord Jesus is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along. I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ. But you know how Timothy has proved himself. Like a son with his father, he has served with me in preaching the Good News. I hope to send him to you just as soon as I find out what is going to happen to me here. And I have confidence from the Lord that I myself will come to see you soon.

Meanwhile, I thought I should send Epaphroditus back to you. He is a true brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier. And he was your messenger to help me in my need. I am sending him because he has been longing to see you, and he was very distressed that you heard he was ill.

## Catalyst: PIVOTAL CIRCUMSTANCES

For many of us we recognise that our discipleship journey is marked by points of growth related to the various circumstances of our lives - pivotal circumstances.

**READING: Romans 8:22-38**

### **HOW DOES THIS CATALYST WORK?**

- When Christians share about their life of faith they will often talk about events that could be described as defining moments.
- Some of these are good things - getting married, new job etc
- Often they are challenging times or moments that involve pain or disappointment.

These are not planned or programmed. They just occur!

Emotionally charged life events have a remarkable way of either developing or eroding our confidence in God.

- The antidote to this is when we choose to challenge our views by engaging directly with a challenge or different view. - e.g. poverty, etc (Kenya trips)

### **Interpreting Events and Circumstances!**

- The World view we hold
  - In this world you will have trouble but fear not I have overcome the world!

- I'll give you a peace the world cannot give
- Good things come from God
- God can use challenges as an opportunity to strengthen faith
- The people we journey with:
  - people who will put things in perspective
  - people who have walked through life with us

### **PERSONAL STORY / EXAMPLE**

- Personally, it has often been in times of stress that I've seen God's real presence and peace - not always power
- e.g. bereavement, operations, financial hardship
- In longer terms - we can use these pivotal points to think about the future
- draw the graph!

### **PRACTICAL POINTERS**

- Approach life as an opportunity to see God at work. The circumstances of our lives are where we see the possibility of God breaking in.
- Small groups - this is who we share a journey with to bring perspective.
- 1 to 1 mentoring - accountability
- avoid a prosperity, consumerism that is prevalent today
- be realistic about spiritual warfare. Check strongholds but don't see everything as demonic!

## Catalyst: Pivotal Circumstances.

### IN - helping a sense of belonging...

What would you say have been the 3 most important events in your life?

### UP - hearing from God and growing...

*Read: v 28 - in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Explore this together and think about the following:

- all things
- for the good of
- God works
- called according to his purpose.

In groups of 3 - share a time when a challenging circumstance has brought you closer to God. Why has that particular event been so significant? Pray for each other and for your responses.

### Together again

Talk about how you as a LIFEgroup can help members when they are going through good times or challenging times. How is that working for you - do you need to change something about how you meet, talk, pray etc?

### OUT - impacting others...

People will often watch us carefully as Christians as we go through life's trials and stresses.

How we respond and react is a massive witness to others.

Honesty and faith are more real than blind and religious words which are unreal and unhelpful.

Who are the people - outside of the church - who you can be honest with but also faithful to?

Share names and pray for them!

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### BIBLE READING:

#### Rom 8:22-39

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long;

we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## Catalyst: POWERFUL ENCOUNTER

For some the experience of 'falling in love' - is love at first sight- it's all 'fire works!' For others it's a gradual journey, it begins with friendship and the sense of love grows. I've noticed that this is very similar to how we relate to God. For some people their Christian life is defined by 'big' experiences of God. For others, there is that growing sense of knowing God more deeply. There is no 'right or wrong', but Powerful Encounters with God can be real catalysts for faith.

### READING: Acts 9:1–22

Saul was a man who thought by persecuting Christians he was doing the right thing for God. In fact the trajectory of his life was going against what God had in store for him.

God dramatically broke into his life. There was a revelation of His glory, and Saul heard Jesus' voice calling to him. After 3 days of being unable to see God used Ananias to bring about a second encounter. Ananias laid hands on and prayed for Saul. Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit (v17); his vision returned (after the scales fell from his eyes) and he got baptised (v18). At once Saul began to speak boldly about Jesus (v19): he was dramatically and forever changed.

### HOW DOES THIS CATALYST WORK?

As we journey through the Christian life there are two significant types of encounters:

1. *Revelation of WHO God is - (this includes conversion)*
2. *Empowered TO DO what God wants*
  - Sometimes these encounters 'just' happen - God breaks in and we are not expecting it.
  - Sometimes they are the result of someone praying for/with us.
  - Encounters with God bring lasting change.
  - These encounters bring a deeper sense of who we are before God, they can deepen our sense of identity or conviction of our call.

### PERSONAL STORY / EXAMPLE

How have I encountered God, at Salvation or in Empowerment?

### PRACTICAL POINTERS

1. Desperate - there is no formula for an encounter with God, only the preconditions of weakness and an awareness of the spiritual need, leading to...
2. Persistent asking and an expectant waiting, *(Matt. 7:7-8: "Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking [reverently] and [the door] will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking receives; and he who keeps on seeking finds; and to him who keeps on knocking, [the door] will be opened."*
3. Points to Jesus - a genuine encounter with God will always lead us to a greater sense of who Jesus is. Saul asked the question: 'Who are you *Lord?*' - his experience led to relationship.
4. Don't rely - our faith cannot simply rely on these 'special' experiences. In fact the deeper journey of discipleship is in persistence and the 'harder' road. *(Romans 5:3-5(RSV) More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.)*
5. Don't seek after experience but rather be seekers of God. Our society is addicted to new experiences. But the experience is not the end, but simply one way that we can grow deeper in our discipleship.
6. Aware of our Spiritual Pathways - there are different ways we are 'wired up' for encountering God. We are all different!

### Challenge & Pray:

Pray for MORE OF GOD IN OUR LIVES!

## Catalyst: Powerful Encounter

### IN - helping a sense of belonging...

Have you ever had an encounter with someone, something, or experience (anything!) that has made a lasting impression on you. What was it, how did it affect you?

### UP - hearing from God and growing...

*Read: Acts 9:1-20*

What do we know about Saul/Paul (you might want to refer to other bible passages)? Why do you think God needed to meet with him in this particular way?

Have a look at the following Spiritual Pathways:

**Intellectual Pathway** - love 'thinking about God'

**Relational Pathway** - being with others draws you into God's presence.

**Serving Pathway** - sense God's presence when you are helping others.

**Worship Pathway** - meet God in praise and adoration

**Activist Pathway** - have a high level of energy and a passion to act, this is how you meet with God

**Contemplative Pathway** - encounter God in large blocks of uninterrupted time

**Creation Pathway** - you sense a closeness to God when you are surrounded by nature.

More info: <http://kevinmartineau.ca/7-spiritual-pathways/> or: *'God is Closer than you Think (John Ortberg)*

Which resonates with me? Where am I giving God space to meet with and encounter me?

### OUT - impacting others...

How might I help other people encounter God?

How can I pray for others in this group? In my work place? Family? Friends? So that they may encounter God?



LIFEgroup  
NOTES

### BIBLE READING: Acts 9:1-20

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied.

The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again."

"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"

## Catalysts for Faith: Additional LIFE Group Resources

This term's teaching has fortnightly LIFE Group notes following each Catalyst. On in-between weeks the Sunday teaching will be based on a Psalm, and space is given for LIFE Groups to decide what would best suit their group.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Prayer & Devotional.** This could include a prayer-walk, or a time of deeper sharing and prayer for each other. Allow yourself the time to be more creative in prayer - maybe with the use of lighting a tea-light from one central candle as you take it turns to pray or to have some stones representing burdens which you can each lay down. Perhaps include opportunity for members to bring their thoughts on a devotional passage or other teaching that has spoken to them recently. You could include a time of practicing the prophetic -
  - **Deeper Bible Study.** The LIFE Group notes are intended to focus more on application rather than study for the sake of Bible Knowledge. However you might want to take the opportunity to look more deeply at a passage or topic. There are a whole host of published small group study guides as one way into this.
  - **Food & Fellowship.** There's nothing quite like eating together to deepen relationships. Maybe when your group normally meets, or it might work better to gather together on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. You could take it one step further and organise a trip out somewhere together.
  - **Sharing Testimonies.** This can be an encouraging time of fellowship, and also a safe place to practice how you explain your personal experience of the gospel impacting you. One way of helping
- each other is to lay out a number of words in the middle (e.g. family, work, church, event, hardship, burden, freedom ... and so on) and ask people to choose three words and explain why they are important. Another thing to try might be to have a go at writing out your testimonies in say 3 paragraphs, or to write your own 'cardboard testimony' (a sentence which says I was.... But am now ....).
- **Worship & Meditation.** As well as asking someone to play an instrument or singing along to a CD there are a whole host of worship ideas for small groups (Google sometimes gives good ideas). The more creative groups might like to try writing their own Psalm on a theme (perhaps adapting one of David's Psalms). Or another might want to choose one of the shorter epistles and try to list as many different promises as they can find and then speak them out as praise.



