



Psalm 133:1

'How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!'

Vol. 3 No. 4 – Motivation for the 'Scripture in Action' Feature

In late 1983, I arrived back in Adelaide after three years living abroad for postgraduate studies. Now that I had returned, I was in the process of "Church shopping", as it were. I asked a member of a local Anglican church about his church and their services. He said that he and his family attended the 7 o'clock Service. I started muttering something to the effect of being able to make an evening of it. He interrupted me to say that he meant 7:00 a.m. He said, "That way, it gets it over with early so that it doesn't interfere with our Sunday". ... I did not pursue our conversation.

Being a Christian is not a one-to-two-hour chore on a Sunday; it is a 24/7 commitment!

Christ showed us through his actions, words, and teachings, how to live a life according to God's Will. This is what we now would call a Christian life. Christ's actions, words, and teachings are communicated to us indirectly through the Gospel accounts and those in the Book of Acts, and to varying degrees through the canonical letters. That is, our Christian way of life is molded by Scripture.

I argue that it behoves us to occasionally examine the way in which we conduct ourselves in our daily life to see whether non-Scriptural prejudices have crept into our actions. Our goal is to model ourselves on the life of Christ, and so we can examine our attitudes and actions to check that they have a Scriptural basis.

This is the motivation for my regular feature 'Scripture in Action', published in the Henley-Fulham Uniting Church's quarterly publication "*Sharing the Love*".

Now, I am not suggesting that, if you are out walking in a park and two bikies wielding baseball bats are attacking you, you fumble in your bag for your Concordance and madly try to lookup "bikie" and "baseball bat" for relevant Scriptural advice! In the moment, you hopefully will, by regularly striving to act in a Christ-like way, react accordingly.

I am suggesting a periodical reflection on your attitudes and actions, and a regular study of Scripture with a mind to how it relates to modern times. My feature provides that opportunity. Then, when a situation arises, you will know instinctively how to respond as Christ would have responded.

Vol. 3 No. 4 – The Troubled Teen – Introduction

Through Volume 3 of “*Sharing the Love*”, I have been presenting ‘Scripture in Action’, where we have considered contemporary scenarios and how we should react from a Scriptural viewpoint. The first three scenarios were quite simple. Let’s see if you’ve got the hang of the idea. The scenario for Volume 3 Number 4 is “*The Troubled Teen*”. This scenario is deliberately more complex and with more possible responses. In Volume 3 Number 3, I asked all the Congregation, either individually or in their Home Groups, to see how they would handle this situation, not forgetting to note the Scriptural basis for their thinking.

I invited individuals or Home Groups to email me with their assessment of the scenario.

Vol. 3 No. 4 – The Troubled Teen – Part 1

You and your spouse have lived many years in an established suburb of Adelaide. You raised two children here, although they have both married and have infant families of their own. You are both relatively recently retired but are still quite active both physically and mentally.

The house across the road had recently become vacant upon the death of the elderly lady who lived there, and it seems as though her heirs have, at least for the time being, put the house on the rental market. A single mother, Sylvia, in her thirties and her fifteen-year-old son, Braden, have moved into the house. They haven’t really been there long enough to have properly settled in and got to know locals, especially because it is clear that Sylvia is not financially well off and spends long hours working in cleaning jobs. Braden has started at the local high school, and typically must leave for school and return to an empty house, as Sylvia is at work.

You have both noticed an increase in petty crime in the area. Mindless graffiti tags have been appearing on fences and signs, letterboxes have been damaged and even one morning you awoke to discover to your embarrassment that your front lawn was completely covered in garden furniture and ornamentation from other residents’ houses around the district! (This happened years ago to my grandparents in Reddie Street, Henley Beach!)

At your next Church Home Group meeting, you bring this up for discussion.

What sorts of things might the Church Home Group suggest?

Vol. 3 No. 4 – The Troubled Teen – Part 2 – The Best Response

One of the Home Groups, meeting at the apartment of Bob and Chris Fuss, gave a well thought out response and wins the prize (a series of lectures on eschatology in Christian theology delivered by me 😊)! The Home Group Members are:

Bob and Chris Fuss, Penny and Brian Wheeler, Rob and Joy Stocker, Jeff Dart, and Phil and Christa Megaw.

“A couple of people commented that some assumptions have been made in how this (scenario) is written, which directs us to think that the graffiti is the fault of the teenager. This may or may not be true.” Well spotted. I set this trap deliberately: it is tempting to leap to the conclusion that Braden is the culprit, but there is no evidence at all that he has anything to do with the vandalism! That does not diminish the importance of the strategies below but we must take care to not leap to presumed guilt.

Some ideas:

- *Try to befriend the boy so that you can ask him if he knows what's been going on. This may not work if he is suspicious of (older) strangers.*
- *Try to befriend the mother - perhaps take over a cake and help them feel part of the community.*
- *Could some gardening or other work be offered to the boy to give him something to do and a bit of pocket money?*
- *Perhaps approach the school counsellor to see if there have been any similar issues reported with this teenager or perhaps others.*

Something I had thought of is for one of the retired men to ask Braden to “help them with some task in their shed”. If his shed is anything like my late grandfather’s, Bill Cornelius from Reddie Street in Henley Beach, Braden will be back with Bill at every opportunity to explore the wonders therein. What a wonderful opportunity for Bill to pass on his skills to the boy, and for the boy to uplift Bill’s spirit and zest for life! It will keep them both put of trouble!

Vol. 3 No. 4 – The Troubled Teen – Part 2 – Scriptural Bases for our Strategies

As for the presumption that Braden has committed any of the acts in the first place, there is an incident reported by the Evangelist John in which Jesus makes his position on unsubstantiated accusations abundantly clear!

John 7:24

²⁴ Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.

If it turns out that Braden is the culprit, then in previous ‘Scripture in Action’ exercises, we have examined Scriptural sources relating to forgiveness of sins.

The dot point actions listed above are worth doing anyway, as they serve to widen and deepen the community. If they happen to address the vandalism problem, then all the better!

As a contemplation on what makes a good Christian community, let us read the concluding remarks of the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians. (Verse 21 in particular warns us not to leap to false judgement, something important we saw in this scenario.)

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

¹² Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil.

²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

²⁵ Brothers and sisters, pray for us. ²⁶ Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. ²⁷ I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

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