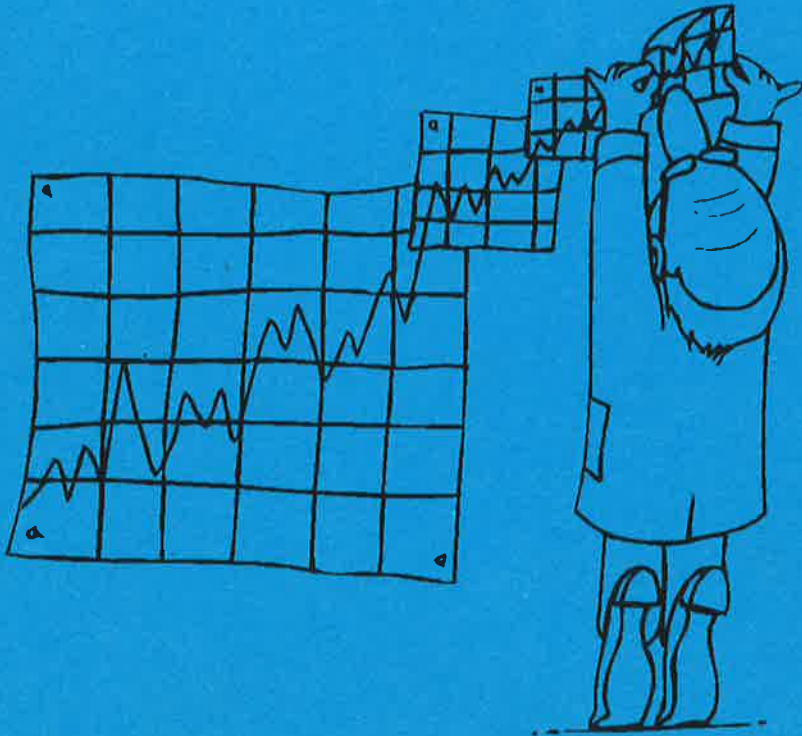


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CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT RESEARCH

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CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT RESEARCH

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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.