

# STUDY 11

## Experts at Nazareth

- 1. Michael Eaton suggests that being an expert in something may sometimes be a hindrance to receiving faith in that area. Can you think of any examples where this might be true today?**

A doctor might find it difficult to receive faith from God to pray for someone with an 'incurable' condition. Someone with great learning in the scriptures might find it difficult to receive new insight from someone of straightforward faith without formal education. But it does not have to be this way. In fact, often in life, the more we know the more we realise there is to learn. The laws of nature, so called, are merely descriptions of the ways in which God usually works.

Some 'expert' scientists who study biology and geology have difficulty in recognising God is the creator of all things and has a purpose for this world. Others recognise correctly, that questions of origins and purpose lie outside the sphere of scientific enquiry and scientific method, however useful these are in very many situations.

- 2. What kind of attitude should we have in order to be able to receive faith?**

A good answer would require a long book. Humility, and an open and obedient heart are a great start. Jesus describes such attitudes in the *Beatitudes* in the *Sermon on the Mount* (*Matthew 5:1-12*). The story of Abraham charts his faith journey with all its ups and downs (*Genesis 12:1- 25:11*). *Hebrews 11* is a good place to begin the study of the theme of faith.

- 3. What experiences of rejection have you had and how did you respond? Reflecting on the way Jesus responded, could you have responded differently and more positively?**

Reflecting on things we could have done better with a view to learning lessons for the future is a good spiritual discipline. This is not a contradiction of *Philippians 3:13-14* which says that we should not be held back by the memory of past failures. A constructive approach is to face-up to failure, reflect prayerfully on what could have been a better way to have acted, confess, receive forgiveness and then move on. All of that can be summarised as repentance - a change of mind leading to a change of action.

In a group discussion, if members of the group feel free to share things that are deeply personal, then it is important that others in the group agree that such matters are not for discussion outside the group context.

- 4. It is very human when people are rejected to get into an argument and try to prove themselves. Jesus did not do that with Pilate and Herod, *Luke 22:66-23:43*. Paul, on the other hand appealed to Caesar, *Acts 25:10-11*. Why the difference?**

Jesus trusted His Father to do this, which God did when He raised Him from the dead. Jesus was content to allow His three years of public ministry to speak for itself rather than argue with a man of doubtful sincerity.

Paul, when he was called to give an account of himself before authorities, took a different approach. He appealed to Caesar. But careful thought shows that the situations are not the same. Paul was defending *the gospel* not himself.

So we need to rely on the Holy Spirit to show us how to respond in any particular situation when we, or what we are saying and doing, is rejected.

**5. Do you think that we should conclude from this study that being an expert in something is a negative thing and something to be avoided?**

Definitely not. But *experts* should give God glory for any success they have, acknowledging that God, the expert of experts has provided the wisdom / skill / knowledge concerned. And all *experts* should allow God to direct and guide them to apply what they have learned. To give an example, the world's most expert truck driver still needs to go in the right direction.

**6. What, for you, is the most striking point in this study and why?**

A good opportunity to allow any group member, who has not had a great deal to say so far, to participate, perhaps by directing the question to them.