

Part 5: The End of our Tether

Spend a few minutes in silence, releasing the day's busyness and distractions. Share how you feel about getting something for nothing. (20 minutes)

Most of us come to a place in our lives where we can take the pretence no longer and we find our shallow responses nauseating and senseless.

Our belief in our gods is threadbare and our anger and frustration at having come to this point in our lives brings us to pits of depression. A choice which is a deep test comes at this time – risk change or play on. We wonder how to change and what hope there is of taking another way. Our efforts to be 'good' and acceptable and 'whole-making' become tangled in greed and suspicion.

We may feel with Paul, who says:

'I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.'

'For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out, for what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. How wretched I am.' (Romans 7:15–24)

We come to wonder if there is any hope of change, of altering our destructive patterns which seem to come so obsessively easily. Without God's help, any significant change is very difficult and unlikely, since our behaviour is governed by our attitudes which were formed before we came into relationship with God.

It is these attitudes which determine for us how much worth we have and how to respond in different situations. Our attitudes interpret reality for us and colour it with our desires and survival needs. They control our lives, however much we like to think that our 'good sense' leads us.

These attitudes and presumptions are largely hidden and thus difficult to work with, but their effects are keenly felt as they are often at odds with our purposes and desires.

As Paul says, 'Who will save me from (myself)? – thanks be to God, Jesus Christ does.'

This transformation is not usually an instantaneous 'cure' of some sort, but a re-formation, a restoration to the former self, the whole self that we were created to be. Just as the prodigal son 'came to himself' in the pigsty, so God brings us to our senses to see what we have done and what we now have to do. Our life continues on its journey, but now we have a different focus of control. Our eyes are opened and we see in a new light.



Exercise

- Read and reflect on the account of Jesus' talk with the Samaritan woman at the well. (John 4:4–15)
- Note how the woman's initial glib response to Jesus reflects her attitude to Jews, and reflect on recent situations in which you have allowed prejudice and familiar patterns to determine your attitude to another person.
- Look at her responses in relation to Jesus' words and again reflect on the way she 'filters' his words according to her established reality.
- Think of a situation in which your mind has been so stuck in its own track that you have been unable to really hear or be open to new ideas. How could you be more open to the other way of seeing in future?

Journal for 5 minutes and then share with the group.

Choose a facilitator and end with a prayer.

Note: For next week we will need large sheets of paper and crayons or felt pens.

At home this week

Read the complete account of the above encounter. (John 4:4–42)

Look at Jesus' side of the conversation in the light of the last two paragraphs of this week's material. In a generous time of silence, allow your imagination to take you through a meditation: Picture yourself in a similar informal encounter with Jesus on an 'ordinary' day. Listen carefully to what he says and be aware of your feelings as you respond. Take a few minutes at the end to record your experience in your journal.

When you have finished, consider the following:

- How did Jesus initiate the conversation with you?
- Did you find yourself wanting to use old patterns to block him off or dodge what he was saying?

Note down in your journal any new issues that may have been touched on. Stay with them and remain open to what God is wanting to say to you.



Sergio Milandri has a Masters in Personal Formation and has been a relationship mentor in South Africa for over 25 years. He and his wife, Elizabeth, live in Hout Bay, Cape Town, and run the Sans Pareil Retreat Centre from there.

For more material, visit www.relating.com or email sergio@relating.com