



How do we as modern day followers of Jesus confront stigmatisation today?



Series of six Bible Studies by Rev. Dr. Andrew Lake



Jesus Overturns Stigma

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of Jesus confront stigmatisation today?**

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**The Leprosy
Mission**
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**Every 2 minutes...
one person is diagnosed
with leprosy**



Before you commence the studies, you will find it helpful to watch the DVD that came with your booklet.

Many people think of it as a disease of the past, but according to The World Health Organisation (WHO) every two minutes, one person is diagnosed with leprosy. Meet Arshad and learn about his story.

Introduction

Jesus overturns stigma

Stigma means a mark of disgrace. In ancient times the term applied to the branding mark burned into skin of a slave or a criminal. These days stigma may relate to a variety of circumstances including race, religion, physical appearance and disease. The Leprosy Mission seeks to help a group who have been stigmatised from ancient times to the present: people affected by leprosy. How Jesus related to people affected by leprosy and other stigma is as relevant as ever. Over six sessions this study helps explore this theme at four levels:



1. Jesus's encounters with the stigmatised as an example of God's love and as a pattern for Christian discipleship



2. How The Leprosy Mission addresses issues of stigmatisation encountered in modern leprosy cases



3. The challenge to modern day followers of Jesus in confronting stigmatisation in our own society and culture: particular age-groups and occupations, minorities, other religions and cultures, certain diseases like AIDS and psychiatric illnesses.



4. Finally there are discussion starters for a study group. These studies will necessarily broach some controversial issues where Christians have differing opinions. In this age of polarised opinions part of our calling is to deal with controversial issues with respect and the humility to listen to others.

Study One

Jesus values the despised





*He has gone to
be the guest
of a sinner.*



Read about Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19: 1-10.

Much as most of us would be happy to be paying less tax we recognise that the people who work in the Australian Taxation Office are doing a vital and generally thankless task. By contrast in Jesus's time tax collectors were despised as collaborators with the occupying Roman forces with a reputation for greed. Jesus was condemned by fellow countrymen for socialising with tax collectors. The term "sinner" was a label to cover anyone 'beyond the pale' like sex workers and tax collectors. Jesus's fellow countrymen were scandalised that he would consort with such people.



You may have noticed that The Leprosy Mission is deliberate in its terminology, referring to “people affected by leprosy” not “lepers” because like Jesus we do not want people defined by their illness. In Nepal, Ubed's neighbour who had leprosy was banished to live alone in a field. He was left without food or proper shelter. Whenever he tried to make contact with his village they threw rocks at him. He finally died: alone, neglected and unloved. Unsurprisingly Ubed was terrified when he learnt he had leprosy. His wife wanted him to leave. Ubed was desperate when he came to the local Health Post supported by The Leprosy Mission. He received Multi Drug Therapy to cure his leprosy. Then he joined a Self-Help Group and was accepted. Imagine his joy and relief, now that he could stay with his wife. Now Ubed works tirelessly with his Self-Help Group to educate others in his region about leprosy. He has seen people lose their fear, and become more accepting of people affected by leprosy. He has also encouraged others with leprosy to go and seek treatment. Ubed wants to ensure nobody has to endure the terror he experienced or die alone like his neighbour.



In Australia we are working hard to abolish racism, hate speech and other forms of discrimination where people are given labels. Among Australian Christians there are differing opinions about a variety of complex issues concerning gender, immigration, euthanasia, with some being more “progressive” and others more “conservative”.



1. What in Ubed's story resonates with you?

2. What can we learn from Ubed's story about responding to disappointment and stigma?

3. How can Christians set an example in dealing with controversial issues? Which of these responses resonate with you?

a. We ignore them and focus on making disciples

b. We present what we believe is the Biblical view

c. We retreat from an increasingly hostile society and concentrate on making our churches into a Christian counter-culture

d. We work hard at listening to those with differing opinions and seek to understand them

e. Other ways? A mixture of some of the above?

Study Two

Jesus blesses the cursed





*Rabbi, who sinned,
this man or his
parents that he was
born blind?*



Read John 9: 1-12.

“His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” In Bible times people with chronic illness and disability were regarded as being cursed, and had to carry a burden of guilt or blame for their affliction. In the Old Covenant there were generational curses like Exodus 20: 5. Later in the Old Testament Jeremiah 31: 27-34 described the coming New Covenant as removing this generational curse and emphasising personal responsibility.



The Leprosy Mission works in places like Nepal where there is a strong belief in “karma”. People affected by leprosy are regarded, and may even regard themselves, as experiencing the effects of past deeds performed in a previous life. The good news of Jesus has delivered many Nepalese from this oppressive belief. Sabitri lives in Nepal. When she was 20 she knew something was wrong with her hands and feet. All feeling in her right leg had gone. Her right foot dropped making it hard to walk. A finger on her left hand had also become numb and ulcerous. Thankfully her father knew the signs and symptoms of leprosy. He told her to go to The Leprosy Mission's Anandaban Hospital where she began Multi Drug Therapy. Sabitri received treatment for the wound on her finger. Doctors also operated on her foot drop. Today she can walk properly again! However Sabitiri received much more than corrective surgery: while at the hospital she decided to follow Jesus. She says “without coming to Anandaban, I would not have been able to receive Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour.” Today The Leprosy Mission continues to support the recently widowed Sabitri with education support for her children.



In Australia we are confronted with the alarming statistics about indigenous disadvantage in terms of education, health, incarceration. It may be seen as our own national version of a generational curse. Changes have come slowly. It was not until the 1960's that Charlie Perkins became the first aboriginal university graduate (1963), the Moree Council rescinded the by-law banning aboriginal people from the public baths (1965) and 90% Australians voted “Yes” in the referendum to recognise indigenous people as full citizens (1967).



1. Everything from removing children from their families to the proposed constitutional recognition have been upheld as solutions to addressing aboriginal disadvantage. Any thoughts?

2. Find out about aboriginal Christians Doug and Gladys Nicholls, and David Unaipon (on the \$50 note). How did their Christian faith help them fight discrimination and advance indigenous rights and welfare?

3. Why do you think Sabitri listened when people at Anadaban told her about Jesus?

4. What can this teach us about how we live for Jesus?

Study Three

Jesus welcomes the ostracised





Read about Jesus and the man affected by leprosy in Mark 1: 40-45.

"Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man with leprosy." In Biblical times the term "leprosy" covered the range of chronic, disfiguring diseases including the type of leprosy now referred to as Hansen's Disease. Leviticus 13 describes a primitive and drastic form of quarantine which had cruel consequences for the person affected by leprosy, particularly verses 45-46.



In some places where The Leprosy Mission works, people with disabilities are locked away because of the shame it brings to their family. In 1964, Wang learned he had leprosy, and was forced to leave his home village. He has never been allowed to go back. Along with other people affected by leprosy he was reallocated to a village in Southern China. Over time some of these inhabitants married and had children and grandchildren. Leprosy is not hereditary but Wang's children were not allowed to go to the local school because of Wang's leprosy. Even though his children never had leprosy. What is more tragic is that Wang's grandchildren who were also not affected by leprosy were not allowed to go to the local school. Wang sobbed as he shared this story of how he went to schools and begged them to let his grandchildren attend. But eventually his children had to go to school in another province. One of the local field staff spent many hours lobbying the local schools to let children, like Wang's grandchildren, in. This is now happening.



In Australia victims of domestic violence also suffer the stigma of shame because it is a family member who abuses them. Only recently has this problem (which has existed in all cultures in all eras) been properly aired. 2015 saw a breakthrough when Rosie Batty, whose son was murdered by his father, was made Australian of the Year for her advocacy for victims of domestic violence.



1. Have you ever felt ostracised for something you had no control over? How did it make you feel?

2. Look at Ephesians 5: 22-24, Proverbs 13: 24 and Matthew 5: 39. How have such passages been used to condone domestic violence by both the perpetrator and the victim? How do we put these passages into proper context and interpret in a helpful way?

3. What positive steps should our churches take to get out the message that domestic violence "is never okay"?

4. How should we minister to the victims of domestic violence?
How should we minister to the perpetrators of domestic violence?

5. Take a moment to ask God, individually, to convict us of a time we might have ostracised or excluded someone.

6. How does Wang's story show us how to move on from this, and help people who are stigmatised?

Study Four

Jesus gives hope
to the desperate





...yet instead of getting better she got worse.

Read about Jesus and the woman with chronic bleeding in Mark 5: 25-34.

She was a broken, desperate woman. Her illness left her socially and spiritually ostracised (see Leviticus 15: 25-31) and financially broke. So her healing brought her more than just physical relief.



Mangla was born with a cleft lip and palate in India. Her father had wanted a son, and tried to give her to an orphanage, but only stopped by her mother's intervention.

At her mother's insistence she was given surgery when she was one to correct the cleft lip. In tenth grade Mangla learnt she had leprosy. She says "I cried a lot when I was told that I had leprosy. My mother asked me not to tell this to anyone. And my father hated me even more." Her father stopped talking to her for months, and wanted her to leave home so as not to affect her sisters' marriage prospects. At a friend's encouragement, Mangla joined The Leprosy Mission's Vocational Training Centre (VTC) in Nashik. She completed a two year secretarial course and got a job. Mangla had received such love and care at the VTC she wanted to go back and work there. She prayed for a job there, and she returned to work there as an office assistant and girl's hostel warden. Today, Mangla is a happy woman. She has completed two degrees and now works in the administrative department of The Leprosy Mission's Kothara Hospital. She is married and has a five year old daughter. She says "Nashik Vocational Training Centre was the turning point in my life. I decided not to bow down before the challenges in life...I knew God would give me the strength to face life bravely. He guided my every step and helped me to be successful. On seeing my success, my father had a change of heart. God brought me honour in front of my father. Now I'm his pet! He wants to live with me".



This is not just a “Third World” issue. In Australia where we confuse “dignity” (one’s perceived worth) with “personal autonomy” (one’s ability to live independently and make choices) people with disabilities are commonly regarded as having less dignity. The euthanasia debate has galvanised the disability community into pointing out that needing help with day-to-day functions does not mean loss of dignity. Whatever your opinion about the current debate in Australia about euthanasia it is worth noting that Australian cultural values interpret terminology. For example, traditionally “dignity” means someone’s sense of being valued, but in Australia it is linked with personal autonomy e.g. “I don’t want to lose my dignity” means “I don’t want to lose my personal autonomy” rather than “I don’t want to lose my sense of being valued by others.” Members of the disability community challenge this assumption because they recognise that disability may limit one’s personal autonomy i.e. they may be dependent on others to help them bathe, feed or move about and yet they feel their life is worth living and they can give and receive love.





1. How does Mangla's story make you feel?

2. What is the Biblical basis of human dignity? Genesis 1 and the words and example of Jesus are a good start.

3. In Australian culture why do you think we have confused "dignity" with "personal autonomy"? (There are other cultures where this is not the case.)

4. What caused Mangla to feel so upset? Was it her condition?

5. How does Mangla's story demonstrate how we can treat people with dignity?

Study Five

Jesus restores the ruined





*Night and day
among the tombs
he would cry out
and cut himself.*

Read about Jesus and the demonised man in Mark 5: 1-20.

In pre-scientific cultures evil spirits have been held responsible for illness and various unexplained phenomena. Interestingly, evil spirits get a lot more attention in the New Testament than the Old. This opens the lid to a 'Pandora's Box' of opinions and speculation. But let's focus here on the love of Jesus. The tortured, self-destructive behaviour of the demonised man is contrasted with the change Jesus wrought in him when he ended up calmly "dressed and in his right mind" and ready to obey Jesus in declaring to family and neighbour's about the goodness and mercy of God.



When Kamless was twelve he went to Muzaffarpur Hospital in India for an operation on his clawed hand. This was after his family had noticed a patch on his cheek. He first received homeopathic treatment, but that didn't help. But then his uncle told him he had leprosy and he went to the hospital. At the hospital he received Multi Drug Therapy which cured him. But he also started having weakness in his hand. "Whatever I was doing I couldn't feel sensation in my right hand, and I couldn't lift any heavy objects". He experienced discrimination from people in his village. People would say to him, "due to sin you have got leprosy". But Kamless learnt about leprosy and was able to say to them "no, it's not due to sin, it's due to bacteria".

His family have now moved to Delhi, and because of the surgery it is not obvious that Kamless had ever had surgery. He is doing well in school, and hopes to go to university. Kamless also enjoys playing cricket. While his hand is not as good as his unaffected hand, he can get by fine, and also helps his father in their shop. Kamless feels very positive about his future. His father was incredibly thankful for how The Leprosy Mission was able to help Kamless.



Still today, people in Australia with visible health conditions, disabilities, and psychiatric illness can experience social exclusion in varying degrees. Isolation is both a consequence and a contributing factor to people's mental health. People with these illnesses are more likely to be homeless, victims of violence, sexual abuse and marginalisation than other Australians. Churches have an opportunity to help such people through the wonderful message of God's love and acceptance through social inclusion.



1. What stands out to you about Kamless' story?

2. Have you ever felt left out because of something that's not your fault?

3. Is your church community fully accepting of people with mental health issues?

4. What does Kamless' response to the people who said he had leprosy because of sin teach us about the positive steps of education around issues like this, both overseas and in Australia?

5. What steps can your church take to be more intentionally socially inclusive?

Study Six

Jesus heals us by His wounds
and calls us to follow Him





*For I bear on
my body the
marks of Jesus.*

Read Galatians 6: 17.

Where Paul describes the marks or scars (literally "stigma") evident of his suffering for the sake of preaching the Good News of Jesus. These are spelled out in 2 Corinthians 11: 24-27, Acts 14: 19, 16: 22-24, 21: 30-32. It is a reminder that following Jesus is a calling to follow in His steps. See 1 Peter 2: 18-21. Cross reference with John 21: 18-19.



In Western Nepal if you meet a pastor and ask them about how they met Jesus, it's likely they'll have been introduced to Jesus through a family member who had leprosy. Jesus is indeed bringing people to him. But Nepal recently put into place a law criminalising evangelism. Nepalese Christians have submitted a petition to their government to strike down this law. Meanwhile Christians in Nepal are saying "You can share your faith when appropriate because you know you have a true peace and you want others to have this." Christians in Nepal have also said if they get caught they are prepared to face the consequences.



Following Jesus in Australia is less risky than following Jesus in places like Nepal, Saudi Arabia, North Korea or Somalia. However some Australian Christians follow God's calling to serve cross-culturally overseas irrespective of their health and safety issues. They give up career prospects, financial security and closeness to family to do so. Have you ever considered cross-cultural ministry?



1. How do you feel about sharing your faith?

2. There are some famous televangelists who teach that God's will is for people to prosper physically and financially and that suffering is a curse. Deuteronomy 28 is a favourite passage to justify this view. How do you respond?

3. Read Luke 14:15-24. What are the typical modern excuses for rejecting Jesus's call?

4. How do you think a Nepalese Christian would respond to this passage?

5. What specifically can you pray for Nepalese Christians, and Christians in other countries The Leprosy Mission works like India?

6. What area of your life has Jesus challenged?

What needs to be done to treat leprosy?



Prevention Assistance

Fresh water, sanitation and education improve livelihoods and lift individuals and communities from poverty. This together with early detection and treatment stops the transmission of leprosy to others.



Diagnosis and Treatment

Early detection and treatment provides the best chance of no ongoing ill effects. A complete course of Multi Drug Therapy (MDT), cures a patient of leprosy. It's needed for 6–12 months, depending on the case. Counselling for the patient and family members is also provided.



After Care and Self Help

Support and training in how to protect, check and care daily for their bodies is essential. It helps prevent wounds or damage resulting in permanent disability. Advanced cases may need surgery, physiotherapy and sometimes prosthetics to help restore limbs.



Combat Stigma with Education

Educating communities that leprosy is CURABLE is imperative! Families and friends of people affected by leprosy are often afraid of catching the disease themselves or believe it's a curse. They need to know how to detect it early, how it's transmitted and how to treat it.



Developing Financial Independence

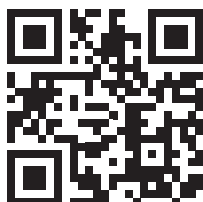
Micro-enterprise initiatives such as raising goats or chickens promote self-sufficiency and provide income. Education and training transforms the life of a person affected by leprosy. No longer shunned, they become happy and productive members of society.

Thank you for completing the study

As a group you may want to discuss what needs to be done to treat leprosy. Then pray as group for people in our world affected by leprosy and disability. If your group is moved to take action and change lives, scan the QR and watch the video. Alternatively visit cureone.org.au to find out how you can cure, care for and restore one person affected by leprosy.

You can Cure, Care for and Restore one person affected by leprosy today!

Visit cureone.org.au or use your phone to scan here:



What the people you help are saying

"I'm not afraid anymore. I was healed and now I'm free from leprosy!"

Joao, Timor Leste

"I now feel accepted and worthy in the community. My life is transformed and I want to be an example to other leprosy-affected people. They can do what I have done and am doing now."

Gouwo, Papua New Guinea

"Our children are already feeling and looking healthier."

The women of
Kuga Village, Nigeria

"Getting all the medicines I need at the right time has been absolutely wonderful. This has been a long marathon but it would have been impossible without all the help I've received..."

Suay, Thailand

"I now have the courage to face anything."

Mahalingham, India

"I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to study in a good school. You have changed my life."

Shuvam, Nepal



About the Author



Rev. Dr. Andrew Lake

Andrew is currently the vicar of St Augustine's Anglican Church in Mentone, Melbourne. His passion to share God's love with others and see them grow in their relationship with Jesus has involved working in cross cultural mission with his wife and family for many years in India, Indonesia and Syria.

Sabita developed leprosy when she was just 17.

At the time, there was no cure for the disease. Her family completely rejected her and threw her out of the house. Abandoned, Sabita is completely alone and living on the streets.



**Have you ever felt rejected or despised?
Have you ever longed for hope?**

Mangla has. Mangla's leprosy caused her father to hate her, and want to kick her out of home. Mangla experienced stigma at a deep and personal level. Easter is a time to remember Jesus' sacrifice. It is also a time many Christians take to remind themselves God is their provider through fasting and prayer. And to remember Jesus is the one who overturns stigma for people like Mangla. The Leprosy Mission Australia has prepared six weekly Bible studies for use anytime. They show how Jesus' encounters with stigmatised people can help form your own pattern of Christian discipleship. The studies will challenge you to confront stigmatisation in our society and cultures. The studies will help groups or individuals connect with God, their neighbourhoods and reveal ways you can help eradicate leprosy and transform lives.



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