

BITESIZE BELIEFS

IDENTITY CRISIS

LIVING OUT WHAT WE BELIEVE

STEPHEN G. DERGES

www.bitesizebeliefs.com

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Dedication

The whole 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' series is dedicated to my wonderful wife Rosalyn – thank you for believing in me, trusting in me and loving me. I know that I'm a better man with you than I would have been without you.

Acknowledgements

Many people have had a profound influence on my life and it's not possible to list everyone here. So, apologies if you are not specifically singled out – your reward will be in heaven!

Countless leaders, speakers, authors – many of whom I've not met personally – have inspired me and helped me develop and I'm profoundly grateful for the books, video and audio recordings and other materials they have shared.

I'm especially indebted to Carl Brettle, CEO of Neighbourhood Prayer Network (NPN), and his wife Rebekah who had the vision for NPN and launched the ministry in 2013 at Wembley Stadium.

Carl was the catalyst for me to re-edit the original editions of 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' and make this publication a reality – I appreciate your advice and faith in me. Do check out NPN's vision and ministry at:

www.neighbourhoodprayer.net

Introduction

Thanks for picking up this book – it's my prayer it will lead to a greater understanding of God's ways and a deeper relationship with Him.

WHY THE BOOK?

As one of a series of 'pamphlet type' books I've written over the years to help people grow spiritually, it's not very long. That's not because I haven't much to say, but in a 'soundbite' and 'instant makeover' age, I thought short, easy-to-read books would be more accessible. I have too many books on my shelves I've started but not finished, I've kept **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** condensed, because I want them to be read.

Although I didn't attend Bible College or study for a theological degree, over many years I've been involved in various leadership roles in church, charitable, community and business settings. As Pastor of a Baptist Church and more recently, Chair of the Trustees and Leadership Team of an Independent Evangelical Church, I've learnt a multitude of lessons – some painful – as well as known God's gracious favour.

'SELAH MOMENTS'... Every **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** book contains references to **'SELAH MOMENTS'** – let me explain.

'Selah' is often used in the Psalms where the writer wants us to meditate on what's been written. The Amplified Bible translates **'Selah'** as: **"pause and calmly realise what that means!"**

Often what we hear and read impacts us just in that moment, so throughout this book there are opportunities for reflection on the personal implications. And please don't skip over the Bible passages – God's word has power – take time to genuinely meditate on them.

So, find a comfortable chair, sit back, get a cup of tea (or a favourite beverage) and you'll be through this book before you know it. But hopefully the thoughts and challenges will last a lifetime.

Stephen G. Berges

IDENTITY CRISIS

I find the English language weird! It must be a nightmare when people from different countries try to learn it from scratch. Often there's no apparent logic or consistency in the way words are spelt and pronounced. I'm sure you can think of many examples – *'bough'* and *'cough'* are two.

And it's the same when it comes to our understanding of different words. Many of us equate *'price'* and *'value'* as being synonymous, but actually they're very different. *'Price'* refers to cost – *'value'* is about worth. Two people buying the same article at the same price, may have a completely different concept of the article's value to them in terms of usefulness.

It becomes more confusing when the suffix *'less'* is added to each word. *'Valueless'* indicates something is useless, irrelevant, possibly obsolete,

yet *'priceless'* means it's precious or irreplaceable. Many of us reading this book have wardrobes full of clothes purchased based on price not value. *"It was a bargain,"* yet remains unused in the wardrobe because the colour or style is now out of fashion so it's of little value.

Take my garage. It's full of items that will come in useful one day; odd bits and pieces that I'm not prepared to throw away because if I do, I'm certain I'll need them. Most don't have any value now – not even sentimental value – yet they take up space and I can never find the item I really need when the time comes! I'm actually kidding myself the real reason I don't sort the garage out is because I value my time more than the replacement cost of the things I've kept.

The same principles apply when it comes to misinterpreting other people. Who can forget the brilliant *Two Ronnies'* sketch about the fork handles (four candles) and hose (letters 'O's) graphically illustrating the difference of saying one thing and hearing another?

Robert McCloskey, an official in the US State Department, often briefed White House correspondents. McCloskey is credited with the following remarkable, thought-provoking analysis of what happens when a 'misunderstanding' occurs. He quipped:

"I know that you believe that you understood what you think I said, but I am not sure you realise that what you heard is not what I meant."

I'm very conscious of the difficulties involved in explaining concepts and principles that enable people to understand my perspective. Sometimes



my writing and speaking styles appear to be flippant and may not always be appropriate, requiring me to modify my approach to effectively deliver the message.

The Old Testament book of Job has a very appropriate verse in this context: *"For the ear tests words as the tongue tastes food."*¹ When answering the Disciples' question about why He used parables², Jesus also realised there's more to hearing than just listening when He quoted Isaiah's statement, *"Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving."*³

THE SIX STAGES OF COMMUNICATION

There are at least six stages in the communication process and each stage offers the possibility of 'interference'.

- **Composition:** our initial concepts and thoughts and motivation for expressing them.

Remember, not everything we think is expressed. We often have *'internal conversations'* with ourselves rehearsing what we're going to say – maybe in our heads or in front of the mirror. Whether we actually say the words to someone will depend on how we're feeling and the circumstances.

- **Encoding:** how we pull our ideas, thoughts and concepts together.

Because people think differently to us, it's usually necessary to sketch out our thoughts even if the first drafts end up in the bin.

- **Delivery:** the method used to express the message.

This depends on the number of people needing to be contacted, the most suitable communication method (verbal or written) and the time and resources available. I can remember when faxes were more urgent than posted letters. Now texts, emails and a plethora of social media provide instant communication.



- **Reception:** the way it is received and often the timing.

This is dependent on the recipient of the message and how they're feeling at the time – under pressure; having a bad day; the location and circumstances, etc.

- **Decoding:** how recipients unpack the motivation and intent behind the message.

Personality is involved especially if they have a *'slightly tender disposition'* – any bad news may be misconstrued.

- **Translation:** how the message is ultimately interpreted.

We should recognise some people are immediately *'put on edge'* by bad news or criticism, whereas positive news is invariably welcomed.

¹ Job 34:3

² Matthew 13:10-17

³ Isaiah 6:9



INTERFERENCE FACTORS

- Messages may also be distorted along the way...
- **Taking revenge:** especially when we have 'an axe to grind' and want to 'get back at someone'.
- **Second guessing motives:** such as what is the real reason behind what they're saying?
- **Poor expression:** if inappropriate words are used or thoughts not expressed fully.
- **Secondhand delivery:** where someone else delivers the message and the original intention is lost.
- **Pride:** constructive criticism should benefit us but perhaps we're not prepared to receive it from some people.

OUR IDENTITY IN GOD

So how does this affect us?

I'd argue there's a similar dichotomy when it comes to faith issues – it's easy to say we believe one thing but maybe it doesn't always play out in real life. This schizophrenic approach is particularly apparent when it comes to recognising what God says about us – especially our status, position and privileges as members of His family. We need to align ourselves with God perspective to avoid a potential identity crisis.

There are so many passages of Scripture we could consider that we could be here for the rest of our earthly lifetimes exploring what God says about us. I want to highlight a few Bible passages

for us to consider.

It's time for our first '**SELAH MOMENT**'. To understand what I mean, please go back to the Introduction page because there are more to come!

Here are two questions to consider:

- **What do I understand about the way God thinks of me?**
- **How do I express this understanding in my life?**

These are vital questions because while some of us can quote the Bible verbatim, there's often a chasm to cross in applying the implications in our daily living. Jot down a few thoughts as the Holy Spirit prompts you.



'**BITESIZE BELIEFS**' are intended to help us develop spiritual maturity, yet growth involves elements of sacrifice (and pain) on occasions as well as discipline. To get the best out of this book it's necessary to face up to difficult issues as we think about what we believe and how it impacts us.

New Testament writers often use the phrase "**in Christ**"⁴ and for us to become

⁴ There are more than 150 references in the NIVUK version of the Bible where phrases such as "in Christ", "in Christ Jesus", "in the Son" and "in Him" are recorded.



more like Him. It's vital we appreciate how God sees us. As in any relationship, if we don't understand where the other person is coming from, we'll never fully comprehend them.

If Lucy and Michael (our children) ever read this book, they'll be laughing now because I want to tackle three specific areas of our relationship with God, using the A-B-C formula. I wish I had a pound for every time they had a pop at me about my sermon points either beginning with the same letter or I use

an acrostic to aid memory retention! But here goes anyway.

A – I'm **ACCEPTED** by God

B – I **BELONG** to God

C – I'm **COMMISSIONED** for God.

I'M ACCEPTED BY GOD

This is a real issue for many people. Why would God want me? What is it about me He likes when I don't even like myself at times? Am I really forgiven?

We may not express these questions in public, yet in private these thoughts and doubts regularly arise.

But the essence of our faith is, because God means so much to us, we allow Him to invade not just our schedules but

⁵ Isaiah 55:8

⁶ Psalm 25:4

⁷ See 1Samuel 13:14 & Acts 13:22

⁸ Romans 5:8

⁹ Romans 8:31-39

every aspect of who we are and the way we live.

So often people criticise Christians because we say one thing and then do/say the complete opposite. Or how about the comment that Christians put on a big act on Sundays yet every other day of the week they're no different from anyone else?

Aligning our lives to God's ways is the key to living purposefully. The Bible may say: ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD***⁵ but that shouldn't stop us trying to find out what He's saying so we change our actions accordingly. King David, the prolific psalmist, implored God to, ***"Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths."***⁶ And was declared to be a ***"man after (God's own) heart."***⁷

For many, acceptance by other people is one of life's greatest necessities. The problem though is we tend to judge everything by human standards and wisdom rather than viewing life from a heavenly or Kingdom perspective. The Father's love and acceptance of us are totally unconditional and unreserved, despite our shortcomings. If we merely rely on human acceptance, we will ultimately be disappointed when others reject us or let us down. It's only in God

through Jesus, we find true acceptance, purpose and meaning in our lives.

The Bible says, ***"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***⁸ He loved us even though at the time, we could do nothing for Him. Now we're His friends instead of His enemies and the intensity of His love for us hasn't diminished. I find it hard to fathom why anyone would believe God doesn't love them once they've become a Christian.

Time for 'SELAH MOMENT #2'.

The table, below, details a few references outlining our place in God's heart – do reflect on their implications.

There are many other verses we could look at confirming God's love for us but this is only meant to be a short book! We may be, or have been, rejected by other people, but there's no chance of that happening from God's perspective when we accept His free gift of salvation.

The Apostle Paul rhetorically asks the Roman church, what or who could separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus⁹, before emphatically declaring he was convinced nothing could – ever!

And in the above Hebrews passage, it confirms Jesus understands all the temptations, disappointments, difficulties and problems we experience

I'm accepted as God's child and adopted into His family	John 1:12-13 Ephesians 1:4-5
I've become a member of Christ's body and have direct access to God the Father through the Holy Spirit	1 Corinthians 12:27 Ephesians 2:18
My sins have been forgiven – no-one can condemn me now	Colossians 1:13-14 Romans 8:1-2
I can come to God whenever I need His grace and mercy because He understands all I'm going through	Hebrews 4:14-16

because He had to endure them too. It means He can empathise with us and knows how to help overcome life's 'hard knocks'.

We are *“more than conquerors through him who loved us”* says Romans 8:37. Obviously the *“Him”* is Jesus but I'd like you to notice the emphasis is *“through”* Him. We can attempt to do everything in our own strength, but we'll only really be successful when we rely on His mighty power.



That's one of the reasons we have the Holy Spirit to help us. The NLT translates the first part of Romans 8:11 as follows: *“The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you”*. How amazing! We're not only accepted but empowered by the Holy Spirit to live victoriously here on earth and for eternity.

The best way to learn a new skill is to observe an expert in a particular area, watch how they do it, ask about mistakes they've made and what tips they can pass on.

Observing how Jesus handled situations, His attitudes and non-condemning

approach, the love and kindness that He demonstrated even in the face of opposition and hostility, provides an example of how God accepts us. Jesus understands because He's been there – He literally bears the scars! – so He knows and is able to not just sympathise but also help us by both mediating and interceding on our behalf.

Let's take an unscheduled **'SELAH MOMENT'** to consider again the immensity of God's love to us and thank Him for it!

The second area is:

I BELONG TO GOD

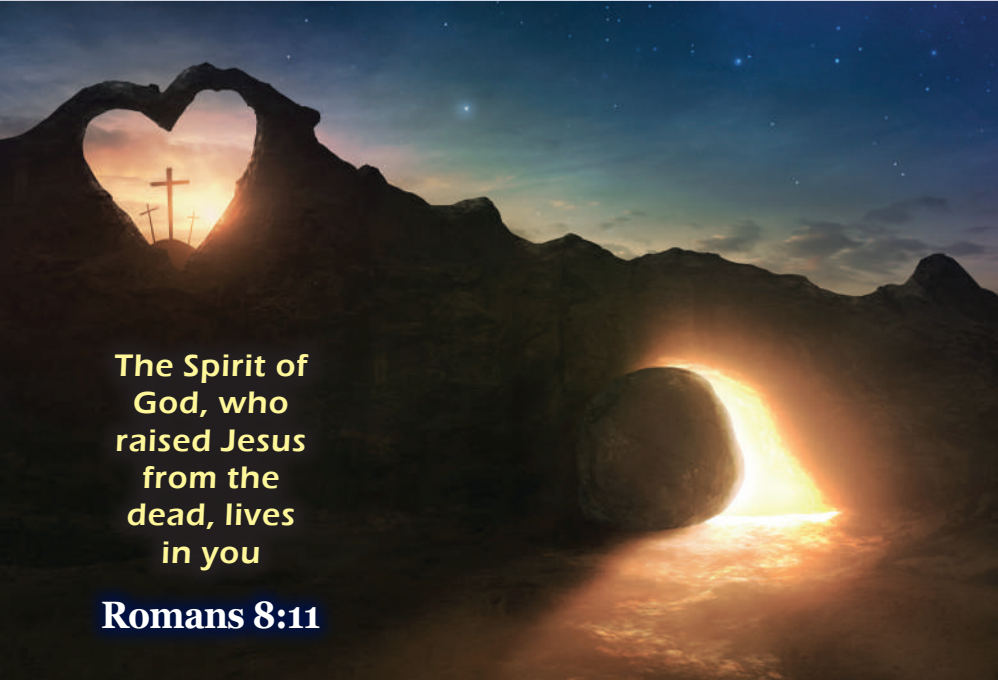
This may be tougher although I don't want to go down the Calvinistic route and talk about predestination and other theological topics which may side-track us.

But the Bible is specific when it talks about this aspect of our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Here's an example:

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.”¹⁰

In the context of how we live and setting an example to others, the Apostle Paul tells us we have been purchased – bought. The payment was made by Jesus at the greatest cost anyone could make – His death on the Cross.

If I purchase an item, it becomes mine and belongs to me. I have ownership of it and technically can do anything I like with it – as long as it's legal. Perhaps I should add *'and morally acceptable'* as some things are perfectly legal to do but



**The Spirit of
God, who
raised Jesus
from the
dead, lives
in you**

Romans 8:11

are inappropriate for us as Christians (or other people) on ethical grounds.

We've been purchased by God but thankfully, although it would be possible for Him to do anything He wants with us, He has granted us freewill. I don't believe we are pre-programmed by God. We're not robots – we're able to make choices in life.

But with choice comes the responsibility for any resulting consequences and they can be good, bad or indifferent – sometimes a mixture of all three.

Many of us want choice without consequences but they go hand-in-hand – we're required to live with the outcomes of decisions we make. Although God gave us the right to choose our commitment level to Him, thankfully His devotion to us doesn't

waver.

Unlike many human parents, our Heavenly Father has an infinite capacity to forgive and not harbour grudges when we get it wrong. The guidelines and instructions He's given us are designed to help us rather than condemn us when we fail.

So what does '*belonging to God*' really mean?

Because I'm a very uncomplicated type of person (don't laugh) I want to liken it to my marriage relationship with Rosalyn. We've been married since 1972 when I was just 20 years old (I was the original child bridegroom) and in a sense, we belong together. Although there are many differences in our characters and personalities, we enjoy some similar interests and have many mutual friends. One of the differences is that Rosalyn likes Country and Western music – although I think that's

an oxymoron!

As our family came later than we would have ideally planned, we had many years to be involved in various activities together. After the children arrived, we ran into the usual problem of finding babysitters, so we couldn't always go out together. Now Lucy and Michael have grown up, left home and have their own children, it's no longer an issue. Phew!

We have separate interests and responsibilities in many areas and we're definitely not in each other's pockets, although we're often involved in the same activities and people associate us together. And that, to my simple mind, brings many benefits.

- We know each other well and understand (mostly) how the other is feeling. Whether I act appropriately though is a moot point!
- We can anticipate things that are likely to have an impact on us.
- It's helpful when on occasions there is a disagreement – I've learned the hard way and now know when I need to apologise.
- Because we're often together, there's less opportunity for temptation in terms of other relationships.

I could spiritualise any or all of the above points, but I want to emphasise is because of the time we've spent together, we've grown close. This enables us to understand how each other feels and can make choices with more understanding of the likely impact on each other.

It's similar in terms of our spiritual relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We're invited to ***"draw near"***¹¹ and ***"come with confidence"***¹². Respectfully recognising the authority of the Godhead, we're able to develop a close intimacy with them based on mutual sharing and accountability.

In drawing this section to a close, let's consider a couple of verses from the Apostle Paul to help us understand our relationship with the Trinity.

In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 we read:

"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

We see all three members of the Godhead here working in unity – God the Father enabling us to stand firm through Jesus the Son, with the additional bonus of the Holy Spirit working in us.

And notice the phrase, ***"setting His seal of ownership on us"***. With God as our owner, we acquire the following benefits:

- We're able to stand up to life's difficulties and temptations. Ephesians 6:10-18 refers to putting on the whole armour of God so we can stand our ground in the face of attack – and stand firm (verses 13 and 14).
- We're anointed – dedicated to His service. We'll think about this aspect later on in the book.
- We have an initial deposit of the Holy Spirit in our hearts meaning we come with the Maker's guarantee.

¹¹ James 4:8

¹² Hebrews 4:16





*"For those
who are
led by the
SPIRIT of GOD
are the
children
of GOD"*

ROMANS 8:14
[NIV]





....from page 14...

We're future-proof. Most items we buy these days have built-in obsolescence – they either breakdown (invariably just after the guarantee has expired), wear out or rapidly become out-dated. Anybody buying a new technology product – hardware or software – knows exactly what built-in obsolescence is. Before it's unwrapped and taken it out of its box, a new version is available from the manufacturer.

Not so with God. Becoming a Christian brings eternal guarantees and if we continue to develop our relationship with Him, we improve, rather than our effectiveness and operational capabilities diminish.

It may seem conceited to say it, but I know my relationship with God is better than ever been because I've spent more time with Him, even if I started from a low level and I still have a long way to go. However because I have made a choice to follow Him and I'm determined to stick at it, there are benefits.

In essence, if we belong to God, it's about the Lordship of Christ in our lives and we need to ask ourselves if we're serious about growing in spiritual maturity.

Here comes another '**SELAH MOMENT**' and a few more tough questions for us to consider. Try these on for size.

- **Have I settled the reality that as a Christian I belong to God?**

This is a profound (at least for me) question because it involves recognising that my life is now not my own.

The first part of 1 John 4:4 (NLT) emphatically declares we **"belong to God"**. Many commentators focus on the second half of the verse – being

"more than conquerors" because we have the Holy Spirit's power in us – but only when we submit to the Holy Spirit's indwelling.



Romans 8:9 (NLT) says, **"And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all."** The Apostle Paul is comparing being led by the Spirit rather than what he calls being led by the **"flesh"**, i.e. selfishly independent, trying to live life on our own terms and in our own strength.

Many churches subscribe to the '**belonging, believing, behaving**' philosophy in terms of influencing people for Jesus. I'd like to add '**becoming**' – because as we begin to understand we belong to God, increasingly the Holy Spirit helps us become more like Jesus in every aspect of our lives.

- **Am I prepared to make my will subservient to Christ's?**

Do we sometimes glibly recite the Lord's Prayer and the words, **"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on**

earth as it is in heaven”?

It's vital to understand that life doesn't revolve around us – we're here on earth to live for Kingdom purposes so that ***“every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”***¹³

Here's a supplementary question, *“What is my response when I know the Holy Spirit is prompting me to do something I don't want to do?”*

Each day we can surrender ourselves to God's purposes. Actually, it's a good idea to pray it every morning as we wake up.

- **In what ways do I need to change my attitude and lifestyle?**

At creation, people were fashioned in God's ***“image and likeness”***.¹⁴ In Colossians 1:15 (NLT) we told ***“Christ is the visible image of the invisible God”***.

Sin and disobedience have marred and

distorted that image but if I do belong to God there will be implications in how I live my life.

Where I go; what films or TV I watch; what books I read or video games I play; my words and tone of voice; how I relate to other people, all need to be submitted to the searchlight of the Holy Spirit.

- **What one step could I take today to deepen my relationship with God?**

James 2:26 (CEV) graphically exclaims, ***“Anyone who doesn't breathe is dead, and faith that doesn't do anything is just as dead!”***

The key to deepening and strengthening our spiritual lives is to do something and there's no time like the present. Let's take a few moments to identify just one aspect of our lives which we'd like to improve. If we don't plan it into our schedules though, it won't happen!



I'M COMMISSIONED FOR GOD

Growth only happens through change – it may be uncomfortable but it's an essential component. Without change nothing new happens. Even if we merely tinker around the edges without making full-scale modifications, change happens – hopefully for the better. Radical change – transformational change – is required if the Body of Christ is going to impact our communities. And we need it quick!

Albert Einstein once said, *"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again hoping that you'll get different results."* Some church activities have hardly changed in centuries. Whilst the message hasn't altered – God still loves the world so much – to be effective, our communication methods need to become more relevant to our culture.

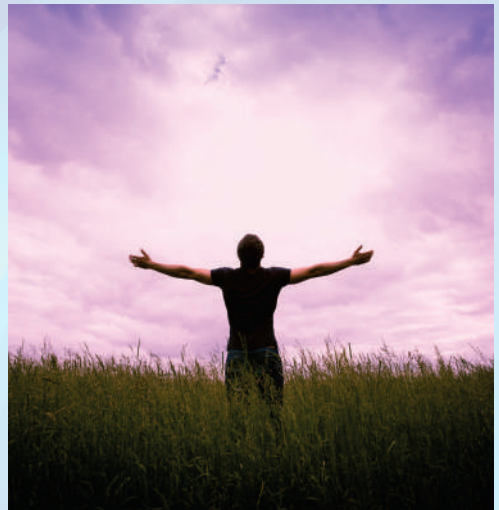
The focus for many churches is still how to serve those who are already a part of it. That usually involves a two-dimensional focus – upwards and inwards. Both are essential – we need our relationship with the Father to develop continuously and it's vital we ourselves grow in spiritual maturity. But we also need to have an outward focus, otherwise how will transformation of the communities in which we live occur?

The Bible says, David ***"served God's purpose in his own generation"***¹³ – The Message Version says, David "completed the work God set out for him" – now it's our turn!

On to our third area...

Commissioned for what? In summary, to fulfil the Great Commandment – to love God with everything we are and have, and to love and treat other people in the same way as we would like to be loved and treated.¹⁶

Thankfully, I was too young not to have been called up for National Service and I've never had to go to war, but I'm aware that in the Armed Forces there



are various officer ranks in addition to non-commissioned officers plus plain, ordinary soldiers, airmen and naval ratings.

British Army officers attend an initial 44-week Commissioning Course at Sandhurst before they're able to lead soldiers. Even NCOs have to qualify in a series of practical leadership examinations.

In God's army, we're all commissioned, yet many folks think they're just foot soldiers and cannon-fodder. Unfortunately, hierarchical church structures perpetuate this kind of

¹³ Philippians 2:1 (TLB)

¹⁴ Genesis 1:26

¹⁵ Acts 13:36

¹⁶ Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27

thinking with often someone taking the lead up front and expecting everyone to merely follow. It's essential we get to grips with the concept of 'body ministry' where everyone is involved.

We can easily grieve the Holy Spirit if we allow so much collective talent go to waste and people's skills, abilities and gifts aren't fully recognised or utilised. It maybe because of custom or church leader insecurity that we fail to utilise the talent amongst us.

This may be controversial, but in practise almost invariably we're taught to focus our 'spiritual gifts' for the Church's benefit. So, if there are no suitable activities where those talents can be expressed, it further exacerbates discontent and disappointment. When people become marginalised, they quickly lose interest and move somewhere where they are appreciated.

I'm not naïve enough to think everyone wants to get involved – part of the reason for this book is to encourage us all to get stuck in and add our piece to the jigsaw. I recognise many have been hurt when their particular abilities aren't utilised. However, unless we reassess our thinking in this area, we'll never see the Body of Christ maximising the undoubted potential available.

Let's consider some of the areas of being commissioned that need to be addressed.

John 15:16 records Jesus words to the Disciples:

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last."

Although these words were spoken to the Disciples specifically, most theologians and Bible commentators

take the view it's applicable for all believers throughout all ages, especially as in the same passage, Jesus talks about sending the Holy Spirit.

On the premise we're all included, we can deduce as Christians we have a job to do and a role to fulfil especially when we incorporate Jesus' last instruction – the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We're commissioned, anointed, appointed, dedicated for a purpose for which each one of us is uniquely equipped to undertake. Our life experiences, character and personality, gifts, talents and passions, synthesise in a distinct cocktail enabling us to serve the Kingdom.

In many parts of the Church, the significance, and the practice, of anointing people for service has been lost. And often we only anoint people into church leadership roles – ministers, pastors, evangelists, elders, deacons, etc. – rather than in other supposedly 'secular' as opposed to 'spiritual' areas. The message is subliminal but clear – only roles serving the local church are significant!

But our lives are not a series of compartmentalised activities. God is interested in every aspect of our lives, not just what we do on Sundays in so-called 'places of worship' or other involvement in Christian activities. As Christians, we are to effectively share the Gospel in every aspect of our lives



– spiritual, vocational, social, relational, communal.

How about anointing business leaders, those who've been elected to local or national government, trade union officials, head teachers or company Directors? Think how much influence people in these roles have with employees, communities and future generations and the impact they can have on the spiritual atmosphere in their vocational area.

After becoming a Christian, Cliff Richard, received huge criticism when he announced he was contemplating becoming a teacher and then subsequently remained in the music business. But that's where God had placed him, and he's been inspirational sharing his faith with other 'show biz' artistes.

Once I asked folks in my church to stand if they were involved in mission. Thankfully most did – maybe because some needed to get the circulation back in their legs after sitting for a long time!

Yet it's not just people who go to foreign lands that are 'missionaries'. In my business consultancy role, I'm a missionary – a representative of Jesus – to the people I meet. We aren't all evangelists, but the Bible says we are all "*witnesses*".¹⁷

I'm confident when rewards for faithful service are handed out in heaven, there will be many surprises who receives top billing. It won't just be the famous Christian leaders and speakers.

There will be unknown prayer warriors and intercessors who've faithfully stuck at it for years, together with many ordinary individuals who just got on with living the life – serving God by serving other people, helping those with

¹⁷ Acts 1:8

problems and doing countless unseen acts of kindness. In addition, there will be others who, by their words and actions, have demonstrated their faith in the workplace or the community.

We need a joined-up, holistic approach as we share the message of God's love and forgiveness.

Here's another '**SELAH MOMENT**' and an opportunity to reflect.

- **In what areas have we been commissioned to serve?**

Think about the areas where we have influence; where there's an opportunity to lead, encourage, support or serve. We may or may not have specific authority, but we can all help shape the atmosphere around us through prayer and action as well as words. It's a salutary thought: we



may be the only Christian with whom people around us ever have contact.

- **What unique blend of abilities, talents and passions do I have?**

How can these be best used to impact

other people? Our skills and abilities can be utilised for Kingdom purposes. When we ask the Holy Spirit to bring opportunities our way, I guarantee He will.

- **Who do you admire most? What can you learn from them?**

Billionaire American investor Warren Buffett once said, *"If you can tell me who your heroes are, I can tell you how you're going to turn out in life."*

Don't just think of famous Christian heroes. Yes, we can learn from the lives of Old and New Testament characters as well as the Wesley's or Mother Theresa's of this world. But how about other Christians who've shown amazing acts of courage and strength to overcome adversity or who have demonstrated significant character traits or been successful in business, politics, sports and the arts?

Someone once said there are three types of people in this world – those who make things happen; those who watch what's happening and those who say "what happened?" Let's not allow ourselves to be in the last category. We're too valuable and precious to God's purposes for that to happen.

Earlier I mentioned we've all been commissioned for a purpose. So before wrapping up this '**SELAH MOMENT**' here are a couple more vital questions,

- **Have I recognised what my purpose is and am I getting on with it?**

- **Am I maximising the opportunities to witness and influence people around me?"**



MAKING CONNECTIONS

Here's a radical thought: how about praying today for the Holy Spirit to lead just one person to cross our path for whom we'll be able to show an act of kindness or say something about our faith? It's surprising what happens when we pray that prayer.



Here's a personal example about an occasion when I was having a haircut.

The hairdresser was aware of my church involvement and my monthly newspaper articles on faith issues. Whilst talking, she mentioned she'd had a bad back for a few days, hampering her work. In fact, she'd closed the salon the previous day, going to bed in agony.

That morning I'd asked the Holy Spirit to somehow lead me into conversations with other people. I knew He was now

prompting me to offer to pray for her – the little voice inside, the butterflies in the stomach and negative thoughts about whether it would work, was a giveaway!

Thankfully I was the only customer in the salon at the time but I was really struggling with firstly whether I really wanted to offer to pray for her and secondly how I was going to bring the subject up. Secretly I was hoping someone else would come in for a haircut which would mean that I'd be able to avoid it.

But guess what? Nobody did! So, as I got up to pay, tentatively I said, *"You know I'm a Christian. Can I pray for your back?"* She responded positively thinking I was offering to pray for her at home or somewhere else. But I knew it was one of those 'now or never' moments, so I said, *"Can I pray with you now, here?"* and did before she could object. Just a simple prayer asking God to relieve her of the pain and to put whatever had come out of place, back again. Would you know it, just as I finished praying, in walks the next customer? God's idea of a joke!

A few weeks later I went back for another haircut and as I walked through the door, she announced to everyone in the salon that I was *'her healer'* (another God joke to cause me maximum embarrassment?)

It transpired that on the day I prayed, her back started to get better and she'd been free from pain and able to work without pain ever since. Naturally I said it wasn't me that healed her – rather God worked through me. I'm not sure what everyone else in the salon thought about it though!

18 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

There were several lessons for me from this experience:

- Pray in faith believing God can, and will, use me.
- Be obedient when the opportunities – ‘divine appointments’ – materialise.
- Whenever possible make certain there’s follow-up. Many people ask for prayer but never reveal what happened afterwards.
- Ensure God receives the glory – He’s the healer.

Even though I’m pleased she was healed, I was somewhat disheartened – as far as I’m aware, she still hasn’t become a Christian. We’ve had subsequent

conversations about the episode, and she’s told other guys from the church and customers about her experience, so she’s not embarrassed by what happened – so there’s still hope.

Often, we’re just one of many links in the chain enabling people to begin a relationship with Jesus. Paul told the Corinthian church, he may plant a seed, someone else may water it, but it is God who makes it grow.¹⁸

It’s the Holy Spirit’s job to convict people – not ours. God works on a different time schedule to us – maybe my next task is to continue praying for my hairdresser and for more opportunities to add links to that chain.

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building.

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

To be salt and light in the community	Matthew 5:13-14
To be catalysts for reconciliation	2 Corinthians 5:18
To be encouragers, spurring one another on	Hebrews 10:24-25
To live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age	Titus 2:12 2 Peter 3:11

THE END IS NIGH

I said in the Introduction, ‘BITESIZE BELIEFS’ aren’t meant to be the ultimate word on a particular subject; they’re meant to stimulate our thoughts and hopefully get us started on changing our ways.

In the same way we take a sip of wine to taste it and check its provenance, this book is intended to lead readers into further study which subsequently produces action. Don’t emulate wine tasters and spit it out, but drink in what’s been relevant and beneficial.

Our final ‘SELAH MOMENT’ is fast approaching, so rather than me having the last word, I want to point out a couple of Bible passages plus some additional Scriptures to read and meditate on.

1. Paul tells the Philippians, *“I can do all things through him (Christ) who gives me strength.”*¹⁹ This is much more than mere positive thinking. It’s

the recognition that in Christ, we have the full backing of heaven’s resources.

2. Writing to the Church in Ephesus, Paul unequivocally states we are *“blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms”*²⁰ There’s really no excuse to plead we can’t do what God has asked us to do.

This final table shows four areas as a starting point for our next steps. How we implement these areas will be totally unique to us, because our purpose and skill set are different to anyone else’s.

Remember, God is not finished with us yet. Paul states he’s confident the One *“who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.”*²¹

The fat lady isn’t singing yet – in fact she hasn’t even appeared on stage! Today is the start of the rest of our lives and, if we let Him, God will work out His purposes in us.

When we start thinking, believing and acting God’s way, there will be no chance for any kind of ‘IDENTITY CRISIS’ to hamper our thinking.

¹⁹ Philippians 4:13

²⁰ Ephesians 1:3

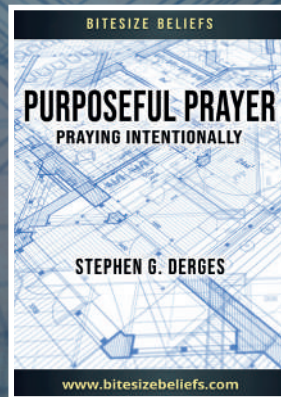
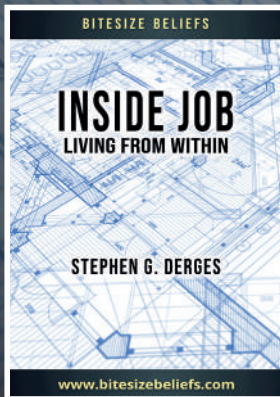
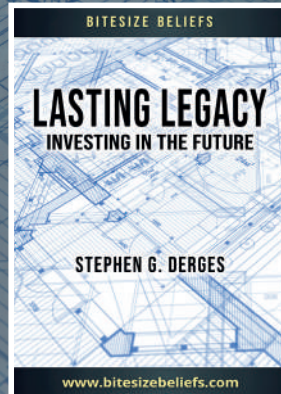
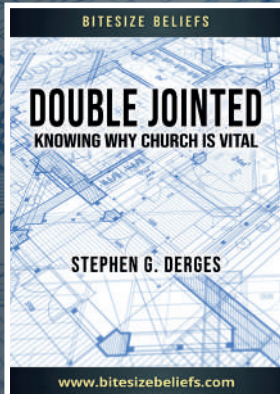
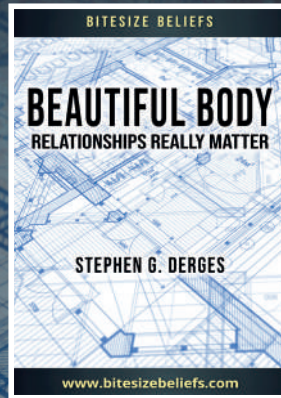
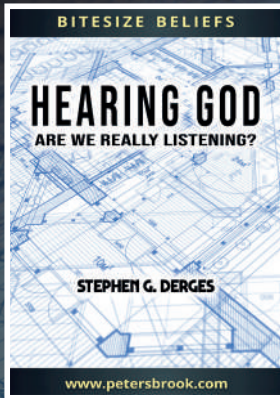
²¹ Philippians 1:6

**“...I CAN DO
ALL THINGS
THROUGH
CHRIST WHO
GIVES ME
STRENGTH”**

Philippians 4:13



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BELIEVINGTOGETHER

Too many of us have become 'schizophrenic Christians' – people who say they believe one thing, but often practice something entirely different.

What do we really believe? Can we trust the Bible to help us in practical ways so that we're not dismissed by other people as being weird or cranky? What does it mean to be 'in Christ' and what about some of those passages that tell us we can do virtually anything?

'IDENTITY CRISIS' looks at some of the questions we're often afraid to ask publicly. Its aim is to help us recognise that we can live meaningful, purposeful lives once we align ourselves with God's Word. As we understand the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing God's ways and allow Him to guide us, we'll find that we do impact those around us without having to shout from street corners.

In fact, if these principles really are lived out then maybe the whole way we look at the structure of Church life, and our role in it, will radically change!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

Stephen Derges was previously Pastor of a Baptist Church and now a Trustee focused on leading an independent evangelical church in Devon.

He writes for various publications and websites, speaks at churches and conferences and has broadcast on local radio and television on faith and business leadership. Both he and his wife are certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® practitioners.

More information at: www.bitesizebeliefs.com



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