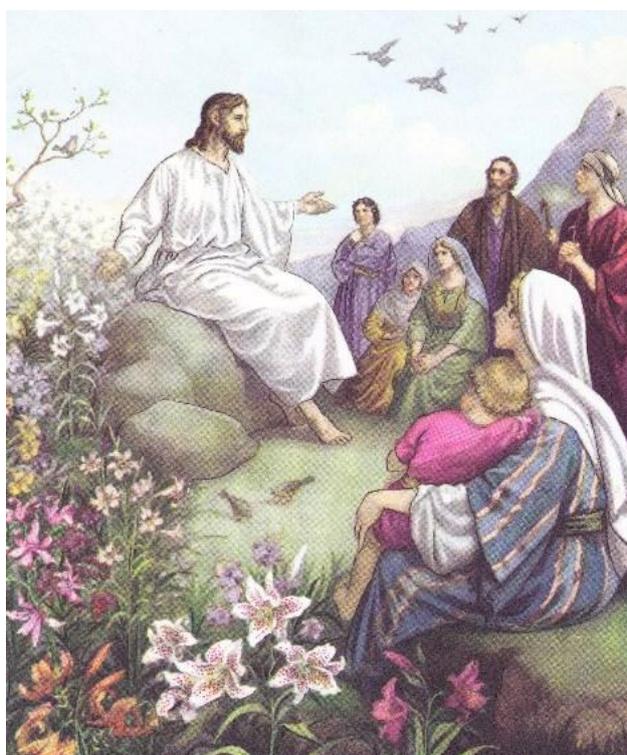


Session 1: By The River

Focus: Meeting with Jesus by the river.

1.1 Sharing Time

The theme of this Ministry Manual is meeting with Jesus by the River Of Life. To facilitate this each participant is encouraged to practice 'seeing in the spirit'. The spiritual realm may be accessed by us all through the power of the Holy Spirit. We may ask Him for a picture of what is going on. This picture comes to us through our senses - perhaps as a visual picture, a word picture, a feeling, a smell or just a sense of something. It is often fleeting and usually requires a measure of faith to accept that yes, this is God communicating with me!



Jesus loved to use pictures too. He often told stories, ones that the people were well able to put their own pictures to. Many of His stories were set in a natural setting but had spiritual truths behind them.

We are going to ask Jesus to come now to each one of us. We are going to ask Him to give us a picture or illustration of a river in the natural but one that will have spiritual truths about our life within it. In following sessions we plan to engage with Jesus in the river but we are going to take it all one step at a time. At this point we are only looking for a picture of the river itself, then where we are and where Jesus is. Nothing else! We hope to use and build upon this picture throughout the course, exploring with Jesus some of the events that have taken place in it.

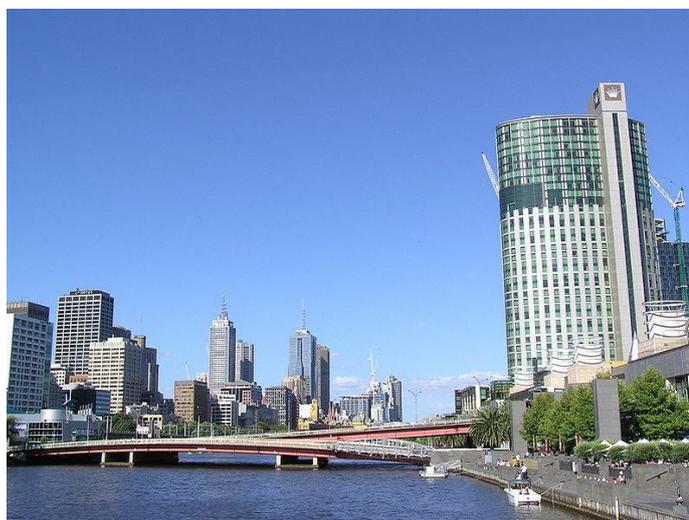
So let's begin! Close your eyes and picture a river in your imagination. Let go of all expectations and just allow it to come. When you have some sense of a river, then picture yourself standing in that picture by the river. Have a look around the scene. As you do this the picture will firm up. Remember that no one river is like another's as we have all been created uniquely. Even on other days when you return to the river it may appear differently as the circumstances in your life have changed. Now we are going to invite Jesus into the picture. In so doing the picture leaves the realm of the imagination and becomes a spiritual reality. *"Lord Jesus, please come and meet with me by the river."* Now look around the picture, looking for yourself and looking for Jesus. Allow Jesus to come up to you so that you can spend some time with Him.

For those who struggle to get a picture in the first place, who struggle to see themselves in the picture, or who struggle to see Jesus in the picture, just be kind to yourself and give yourself time to develop this skill. Perhaps it is your first time looking to see, perhaps you are unsure

of what will happen, perhaps things need to be cleared up with Jesus before you allow Him to come closer, or perhaps there may be blockages. We will tackle all of these issues in Small Group and over time. Remember that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). People do things for reasons, and there are reasons as to why you are not yet ready to meet with Jesus by the river. In time, Jesus will reveal the reasons as to why.

1.2 Life By The River

Over the centuries towns and cities have traditionally developed along the banks of rivers. Rivers were important as they provided a source of life for the people who lived alongside them. A source of water was readily available, water for drinking, irrigation and washing. Rivers provided a source of nourishment through their fish and the animals that lived along their banks. Rivers also provided a source of transport, recreation, refreshment and aesthetic beauty.



It is significant then, that there are three instances in the Scriptures where God describes a river flowing from His very presence. In each instance this river provides a source of life wherever it flows – trees grow abundantly along its banks, including fruit trees that regularly bear fruit; swarms of living creatures gather wherever its waters flow; its waters are teeming with fish and overall the favour of God is evidenced. The first passage is found in Genesis 2:8-15, the second in Ezekiel 47:1-12 and the third in Revelation 22:1-6. Read the three passages out aloud.

In the book of Genesis we have the account of God planting a garden in the east, in Eden (Genesis 2:8-15). This garden was also known as the garden of God (Isaiah 51:3, Ezekiel 28:13, 31:9). As with all gardeners, God delighted in His garden (Eden means ‘delight’ and ‘pleasure’) and filled it with every good thing. A river flowed from Eden through the garden and watered it. Then God created Man and placed him in the garden to work it and take care of it. In the cool of the day God would come and visit Adam and Eve, to spend time with them and to chat with them about the garden. Adam and Eve met with God face to face. They walked in His presence and enjoyed the bounty of the garden that was watered by the river that flowed from Eden. It was God’s hope that they would turn to Him for all their needs, that He personally would be the source of their life. But it was not to be. Adam and Eve had other ideas - they sought to be the source of their own life and decision making. They chose to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After their disobedience God expelled them from the garden and banished them so that they would no longer have access to the tree of life and live forever (Genesis 3:22-24).

Centuries later, when the Israelites had left Egypt and were out in the desert, God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle. He said, “*Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.*” (Exodus 25:8-9). God’s heart was still to dwell amongst His people, to be their

source of life. About another 480 years after that, God instructed King Solomon to build the Temple. God promised that if Solomon were obedient in keeping all God's instructions, then God would "... fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father. And I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel." (1 Kings 6:11-13). Again the Lord reiterated His promise to live amongst His people.

In the book of Ezekiel, we read that during the Babylonian captivity Ezekiel had a vision. Ezekiel was familiar with the Temple as he had been born into a priestly family and grew up in the surroundings of the Temple in Jerusalem. In his vision he saw water flowing from under the threshold of the Temple (Ezekiel 47:1-12). This river flowed from the very residence of God, from His presence. The river began as a mere trickle that was only ankle deep and ended up becoming a river so broad and wide that it could not be traversed. In this formerly desert land a great number of trees grew along the banks of the river; swarms of living creatures lived wherever the river flowed; fish abounded in this river; all kinds of fruit trees grew on both banks of the river bearing fruit for food and leaves for healing. This is an incredible picture of the abundance of living by a river that flows from the very presence of God.

In the book of Revelation, a similar vision was given to John. John described his account of seeing the new heaven and the new earth. He saw the new Jerusalem coming down and he heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*" (Revelation 21:3). He saw the river of the water of life now flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. As in Ezekiel, it flowed from the very presence of God. It flowed down the middle of the street of a city. On either side of the river stood numerous trees of life, the same ones that Adam and Eve had been banished from in the garden of Eden. These trees bore fruit every month and their leaves were to be used for the healing of the nations.

Then comes the invitation. It is issued in Revelation 22:17, "... *"Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*" The river of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb and we are invited to come and drink freely from it. We are invited to come and partake of its nourishment, of its healing properties. We are invited to come and soak in the very presence of God! It is life giving and abundant; and we are invited to come!

This Ministry Manual seeks to facilitate the soaking in this river of life and meeting with Jesus there. We will also be exploring some of the issues that keep us from soaking in this river, some of the issues that arise when we wander away from the river, and for those who are hungry for more, how to soak more deeply in the things of the Spirit.

1.3 Demonstration Ministry

These public Demonstration Ministry times offer opportunities to practice what has been taught in the session. This is a time to give a practical demonstration, to watch how others receive, to practice hearing from Jesus yourself and to just have a go. It is one thing to read about Jesus in the Scriptures, but an altogether different experience to meet with Him personally. This personal intimacy may take time to grow and develop but Jesus is always keen to meet with us. For James 4:8 says, "*Come near to God and he will come near to you.*"

Note for Leaders:

Remember that it is your responsibility to keep the participant safe at all times by:

- Always allowing Jesus to lead.
- Always offering the participant a choice in whether to proceed or not.
- Always praying protection over the participant's heart before you start.
- Praying prayers of comfort over the heart if fear rises up.
- Looking for where Jesus is again and again in each circumstance.
- Binding back the darkness.

The Leader may now invite a participant to come forward, one who is willing to participate in a public ministry session. The Leader doesn't choose anyone, he/she just issues the invitation – God will do the prompting! When a volunteer comes forward, the Leader invites the participant to come and sit at the front so that everyone may observe what takes place. The Leader invites the participant to close his/her eyes and wait with expectation. Then the Leader invites Jesus to come and meet with him/her by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Start by inviting the participant to picture a river in his imagination. Ask him to describe it out loud. Then invite him to picture himself standing by the river. Have a look around to see what it is like. No river is ever the same as anyone else's because we are all created uniquely. Then invite Jesus into the picture. In doing so the picture leaves the realm of the imagination and becomes a spiritual reality. The interaction that ensues between Jesus and the participant takes place in the spiritual realm. What takes place in the spiritual realm has a flow on effect upon the natural realm, and vice versa.

Invite the participant to have another look around the river, looking for where he is and then for where Jesus is. If Jesus appears in ways that He is described in Scripture, if the atmosphere is peaceful, if the participant feels safe with Jesus by their side, then proceed. If not, then go back and invite the True Lord Jesus to come. (Refer to the glossary notes regarding a 'false Jesus' and the True Lord Jesus Christ). If the participant is not yet comfortable in being by the river, or with inviting Jesus there, then that's fine too. Just leave things as they are. The rest will come in due time. Remember that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). People do things for reasons, and there is a reason as to why you are not yet ready to meet with Jesus by the river of life. In time, Jesus will reveal the reasons why.

If the participant's heart feels safe being with Jesus by the river, then invite him to enter the river with Jesus. Invite Jesus to spend time with the participant in the river. Encourage the participant to speak out what is going on, so if needed the Leader can facilitate further. Just continue to follow Jesus as He spends time with the participant in the river. Finish off the session by praying a prayer of blessing over the participant. Allow 10 minutes for this.

If the participant's heart does not feel safe about being by the river with Jesus, then pray some prayers of comfort over his heart. Invite Jesus to come to reassure him that He is present and that He always holds all things in His hand. If Jesus reveals something at this time, again invite Him to lead. If not, just continue to pray in comfort and pray off any condemnation for not being able to be by the river with Jesus at this time. Jesus never condemns us for He knows that there is always a reason as to why we do the things we do. We ourselves are not always aware of it, but Jesus knows. He knows and He comes. Then finish off the session in prayer by praying a blessing over the participant. Allow 10 minutes for this.

In allowing 10 minutes for this exercise, we restrict it from going too deep or for too long. Remember that this is just a demonstration. The aim of this ministry is to foster a positive encounter with Jesus that will lead the participant to hunger for more.

After the demonstration has come to a conclusion, invite everyone to come and be by the river of life with Jesus for 5 minutes. Just come into a place of stillness by the river and spend some time quietly there with Jesus. The Leader begins by inviting Jesus to show everyone a picture of the river, then inviting each participant to picture themselves in the scene, and then by inviting Jesus to reveal Himself. At this point everyone is left to be by the river with Jesus.

Testimony:

One afternoon I lay down on my bed and tried to picture myself by the river. It was so hard to focus on just this. I tried but I just could not get there. "Why?" I wondered. And then I knew. Every time I closed my eyes and tried to imagine it, I got into a state of panic. For me to be relaxed around the water with my eyes closed was not safe! What was I going to do? Finally I said to Jesus that He would have to find me a place where I felt safe enough to step into some water. I laughed when he showed me where.

When we were young, mum used to take us to Seville swimming pool. They had a baby pool that was only a few inches deep. We'd often lie in it at the end of the day, as it was nice and warm. Jesus brought me to that place. There were so many mums and kids around, splashing and chatting away. I wondered why Jesus would bring me to such a busy place? How would I ever rest in peace and quiet here?

But as I thought about it, I knew that Jesus was right. This place was familiar; I had good memories of it. It was a family place; it was a safe place. So I hopped into that pool and lay down on my back and closed my eyes. I could hear children laughing; I could hear mums talking. I was getting splashed as other kids went past me; it was noisy. But I was warm and I felt safe. I knew that Jesus was also sitting on the edge of the pool keeping watch over me and so I took a deep breath and began to relax. - Julie

1.4 Small Groups

It is now time to break up into your small groups for personal prayer ministry. Once the groups are organised and settled, the small group Leader will offer prayer to those who want to receive ministry in this first session. Others may want to observe for a little while longer until their heart feels a little safer in the group. There is no condemnation for not being willing to open up on the first (or any other) session. Jesus always accepts us where we are today. He also knows why we may find it difficult to open up and share ourselves before others. He does not condemn us but comes in a way that we are able to receive Him and at a pace that we can manage. He is always a gentleman!

In the large group and at home, everyone is encouraged to soak in the river of life with Jesus. But in the small group setting, we will be offering prayer ministry in the context of the river of life. Proverbs 4:23



tells us to, *“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”* Sadly for us our heart has not always been so well guarded, either by our parents when we were young, or by ourselves as we became adults. Unpleasant events have entered and been stored away at a heart level, which time has been unable to erase. On occasion we still live out of those broken places and they tend to come up at the most inopportune times. In prayer, we can ask Jesus to help clarify how the hearts feels about the river and what has happened in there because the heart is not always aware of what is stored within (Jeremiah 17:9). But Jesus comes as the Truth and He brings Truth to the inner places (Psalm 51:6). Then the healing flows.

The Leader now offers prayer to participants one by one in much the same way as in the Demonstration Ministry. Those who feel safe are invited to enter the river with Jesus by their side. Those who do not feel safe are offered prayer to meet with Jesus by the river’s edge. In each instance invite Jesus to reveal where He is and then follow His lead with whatever comes up.

If the participants feel safe and confident in being by the river with Jesus, encourage them to practice entering the river at home. Invite them to go ankle deep, knee deep, waist deep and so on just as in the vision of Ezekiel. Remind them not to go anywhere in the spiritual realm without Jesus being present.

For those not so keen to enter the river yet, encourage them to practice being safe with Jesus by the river’s edge. There is no pressure for them to enter the river at any time. If the pressure comes, bind it away to the cross and allow Jesus to carry it for you.

1.5 Prayers

Protecting and comforting the heart (Leader)

Dear Lord Jesus, I ask that You would place your hedge of protection around (name of participant) heart. Keep him/her hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:3). I ask that You would comfort the heart with reassuring words. (Allow a moment for the participant to listen for the words. If he/she does not hear anything, then the Leader is to pray comfort from the Scriptures.) Thank You Lord. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Binding back the darkness (Leader)

In the name of the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I take up my authority as the son/daughter of the King, and I bind back all darkness currently present in this situation. Lord I ask for more of Your light to shine in this situation (John 8:12), and that as Your light shines, the darkness must retreat. Lord I ask that You would come and deal with the darkness so that (name of participant) might be able to see and hear from you more clearly. In Jesus’ name only. Amen

Binding away condemnation (Leader)

In the name of the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I take up my authority as the son/daughter of the King, and I bind away all condemnation to the cross. Jesus died on the cross for all sin and its consequences, so I bind away the condemnation to You Lord. Thank You Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1.6 Journal

Draw a sketch of the river. Mark in where you are. Invite Jesus to show you where He is. Spend some time with Him and journal what takes place.