

# Scripture in Action

A presentation to the Adelaide West Progressive Christianity Service

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**Abstract:** Alan Branford is a member of Henley-Fulham Uniting Church and is a Features Contributor to the Church's quarterly magazine "*Sharing the Love*". His Feature each issue is called '**Scripture in Action**'. A contemporary scenario, sometimes real, sometimes based on real events, sometimes hypothetical, is introduced. The reader is asked questions such as "What would you do next?" In answering these questions, readers are asked to reflect on how Scripture can inform and influence their response. Later in the magazine, there is a short discussion in which the author presents possible answers and the Scriptural basis for his answers.

In the Progressive Service, Dr Branford will talk about the motivation for this Feature and give some examples.

### **PRESENTER:**

In late 1983, I arrived back in Adelaide after three years living abroad for postgraduate studies. Now that I had returned, I was in the process of "Church shopping", as it were. I asked a member of a local Anglican church about his church and their services. He said that he and his family attended the 7 o'clock Service. I started muttering something to the effect of being able to make an evening of it. He interrupted me to say that he meant 7:00 a.m. He said, "That way, it gets it over with early so that it doesn't interrupt our Sunday". ... I did not pursue our conversation.

Being a Christian is not a one-to-two-hour chore on a Sunday; it is a 24/7 commitment!

Christ showed us through his actions, words, and teachings, how to live a life according to God's Will. This is what we now would call a Christian life. Christ's actions, words, and teachings are communicated to us indirectly through the Gospel accounts and those in the Book of Acts, and to varying degrees through the canonical letters. That is, our Christian way of life is molded by Scripture.

I argue that it behoves us to occasionally examine the way in which we conduct ourselves in our daily life to see whether non-Scriptural prejudices have crept into our actions. Our goal is to model ourselves on the life of Christ, and so we can examine our attitudes and actions to check that they have a Scriptural basis.

This is the motivation for my regular feature 'Scripture in Action', published in the Henley-Fulham Uniting Church's quarterly publication "*Sharing the Love*".

Now, I am not suggesting that, if you are out walking in a park and two bikies wielding baseball bats are attacking you, you fumble in your bag for your Concordance and madly try

to lookup “bikie” and “baseball bat” for relevant Scriptural advice! In the moment, you hopefully will, by regularly striving to act in a Christ-like way, react accordingly.

I am suggesting a periodical reflection on your attitudes and actions. My feature provides that opportunity.

Let’s see how it works.

## **VOLUNTEER READER #1:**

### **Scenario for Volume 3 No.1: The Old Man in Prague – Part 1**

Some years ago, I was holidaying in Central Europe with my mother, and we were enjoying a stay in Prague. Looming over the Old Town and Wenceslas Square, on the other side of the River Vlatva, the Prague Castle complex stretches up a hill, with the Castle itself, St Vitus Cathedral and many smaller structures.

Most visitors access the Castle complex from the Old Town by crossing the River Vlatva via the famous Charles Bridge. On this particular day, my mother and I were exiting the Castle complex via the rear into some residential streets to walk to a tram stop.

Just after leaving the Castle complex there was a small triangle of land formed by the street layout that had been left as a plain grass reserve. There in the middle of the reserve was an elderly man lying prostrate on the ground and not moving. We looked around, and not a single soul could be seen in any of the surrounding streets.

My mother and I were strangers in a country whose language we could not speak. The country was not much more than a decade released from the tyranny and mindset of the Soviet bloc. If the old man were dead, or if he had been physically attacked, or even if he just had suffered a medical episode, any involvement with the authorities would likely have been a fraught experience.

Situations such as these are also often used as subterfuges to prey on visitors like us. The old man could be a decoy to lure us into a distraction, only to find ourselves set upon by a gang hiding nearby. The old man himself may have been armed with a knife and seeking to rob us directly.

What would you have done?

**MODERATOR:** A short discussion on Scenario #1.

## **PRESENTER:**

### **Scenario for Volume 3 No.1: The Old Man in Prague – Part 2**

The Scripture most relevant here is obvious. My mother and I were players in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). We could have turned on our heels and gone back into the Castle complex. We could have pretended not to see the old man and hurried off down a side street. But then we would have been the priest or the Levite in the Parable. Our Christian duty was to be the Samaritan.

But Scripture encourages prudence in such matters. Proverbs 22:3 (repeated as Proverbs 27:12) advises, “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.” I positioned my mother near whence we came, with instructions to not look at me or the old man, but instead to look at all the surrounds and to yell if any people suddenly appeared. Meanwhile, I slowly approached the man from a direction where he would see me if he were conscious.

These simple precautions do not guarantee safety, of course. But we are reminded constantly in Scripture that, when you are doing God’s Will as revealed by Jesus Christ, then he will “have your back”. Psalm 121 (‘A song of ascents’) is always worth keeping in mind. I wrote about Psalm 121 in the booklet "Psalms – Reflections for Lent" by Henley-Fulham Uniting Church 2022. Then there’s Romans 8:31, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” or Hebrews 13:6, “So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” or Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

The old man was conscious, and through a charade of hand and arm gestures, I was able to discern that he was unhurt and had simply tumbled over and was now unable to get himself up. I assisted to right him, and with some Czech words that I hope was a thank you, he toddled off.

We too toddled off and caught our tram.

## **VOLUNTEER READER #2:**

### **Scenario for Volume 3 No.2: Workplace Harmony – Part 1**

You work in an open-plan office with three other colleagues, Julian, Shannon, and Emily. You, Shannon, and Emily are all in your mid-thirties, but Julian is a twenty-something young man who thinks he’s a bit of a suave man-about-town.

The workplace is reasonably harmonious, except for one thing. Julian arrives for work each day smothered in an appallingly cheap and nasty cologne. The fragrance seems to rapidly take over the whole office space, including your own clothes. Julian obviously seems to like it and thinks that it adds to his persona. The rest of you just find it an irritating, sickly smell.

Shannon and Emily now regularly discuss the smell in terms that are very disparaging of Julian. They also act critical pantomimes, such as feigning asphyxiation, after Julian walks by. Poor Julian is now often nicknamed “Durian” behind his back, durian being a southeast Asian fruit that has a stomach-churning smell. Shannon and Emily are expecting you to join in their “games” as well.

What do you do?

**MODERATOR:** A short discussion on Scenario #2.

## **PRESENTER:**

### **Scenario for Volume 3 No.2: Workplace Harmony – Part 2**

I would look for or even work to create a situation in which I could speak with Shannon and Emily in the absence of Julian. I would point out to them that we all have characteristics that might offend others. They carry on their games without Julian even being aware of the characteristic that they see as offensive in him. (Scriptural basis. From the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:1-5, “1“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. ...”.)

Furthermore, I would encourage them to talk to Julian about the problem of the cologne. Due to his age and limited life experience, he may even be grateful to you for your advice. Ephesians 4:29 is relevant here, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Matthew 18:15 could also be seen as relevant, although I would not go so far as to label Julian’s cologne as a “sin”, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.” Also, insistence on talking to Julian about the issue, rather than just stopping their “behind-his-back games”, derives from James 2:26, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

If Shannon and Emily are dismissive of my rebuke, then I would tell them that if they do not follow my advice, then I will have a quiet word with Julian instead. (Scriptural basis. The same passages of Scripture in the last paragraph would apply to me as much as to Shannon and Emily.) Furthermore, I would inform Shannon and Emily that if they persist in their unkindness towards Julian, then I would report the matter formally as workplace abuse. (Scriptural basis. 1 John 3:17-18, “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” That is, take action!)

If Julian is unresponsive to a calm explanation of the problem, then that too would have to be taken up as a workplace matter, the same instruction to “take action” being now applicable here.

## **PRESENTER:**

### **Scenario for Volume 3 No.4 preview:**

The first three scenarios have been quite simple. Let’s see if you’ve got the hang of the idea. Now I am previewing the scenario for Issue 4, *The Troubled Teen*. This scenario is deliberately more complex and with more possible responses. I want all the Congregation, either individually or in your Home Groups, to see how you would handle this situation – don’t forget to note the Scriptural basis for your thinking.

Please email me your assessment of the scenario, and let’s see if people come up with different approaches. Email your response to [alan.branford@live.com](mailto:alan.branford@live.com) by the due date for Issue 4, and please indicate if you wish your response to be attributed to you or to be anonymous.

## **DON'T FORGET YOUR HOMEWORK!**

### **Scenario for Volume 3 No.4 preview: The Troubled Teen – Part 1**

You and your spouse have lived many years in an established suburb of Adelaide. You raised two children here, although they have both married and have infant families of their own. You are both relatively recently retired but are still quite active both physically and mentally.

The house across the road had recently become vacant upon the death of the elderly lady who lived there, and it seems as though her heirs have, at least for the time being, put the house on the rental market. A single mother, Sylvia, in her thirties and her fifteen-year-old son, Braden, have moved into the house. They haven't really been there long enough to have properly settled in and got to know locals, especially because it is clear that Sylvia is not financially well off and spends long hours working in cleaning jobs. Braden has started at the local high school, and typically must leave for school and return to an empty house, as Sylvia is at work.

You have both noticed an increase in petty crime in the area. Mindless graffiti tags have been appearing on fences and signs, letterboxes have been damaged and even one morning you awoke to discover to your embarrassment that your front lawn was completely covered in garden furniture and ornamentation from other residents' houses around the district! (This happened years ago to my grandparents in Reddie Street, Henley Beach!)

At your next Church Home Group meeting, you bring this up for discussion.

What sorts of things might the Church Home Group suggest?

**MODERATOR:**       General discussion.