

THE FATHER RAN



by Neville Holmes

THE AUTHOR

Neville Holmes was a missionary with the Middle East Christian Outreach in the Arab world and now resides in Cape Town.

He remains very active in his Christian witness, preaching in local churches whenever the opportunity arises. He also actively spreads the Gospel through one-on-one contacts and handing out Christian tracts to whomever he meets during his daily walk with his Saviour.

Learning the culture and language by experience, he came to understand the Bible and especially the parables in the light of the Middle East culture.

Many have expressed their desire for a layman's book on the parables as seen through that culture.

This book is intended to cater for that need and it is the desire of the author to be a blessing to all who read it.

FROM THE PUBLISHER

This book by Neville Holmes is marked by sincerity and a genuine desire for the reader to discover that we all have an eternal destiny and we will spend it somewhere. Finding Jesus Christ and making Him the centre of our lives should be every person's goal and to have a One-on-one relationship with Him.

It has been a blessing and a privilege to produce this book.

Neville's knowledge of the Scriptures and experiences in the Middle East come from a life dedicated to passing on the message of Salvation.



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The Father Ran

The Bible viewed through the culture of the Bible lands

By Neville Holmes



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	5
PREPARATION FOR THE MISSION FIELD.....	7
BIBLE CULTURE TODAY	20
THE FATHER RAN Luke 15	28
JESUS AND THE MONEY ISSUE Luke 16.....	41
GUIDANCE BY GOD.....	45
ABRAHAM AND JACOB.....	49
ADOPTED LIKE JACOB	55
THREE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LIFE OF JACOB	86
TWO KINDS OF SEED Deuteronomy 22:9-12	90
ONLY YOU	93
THE APPOINTED TIME.....	95
RUTH	97
THE SHEPHERD’S PSALM.....	102
THE THREE PSALM Psalm 32	107
TALKING TO YOURSELF Psalm 42.....	110
THE RICH MAN WHO THOUGHT HE WAS POOR Psalm 73	112
THE LIFE OF FAITH Psalm 120 to 134	119
DISCARDED	135
LESSONS FROM THE SERVANT Songs in Isaiah	138
THE PRIEST WHO BECAME A PROPHET Ezekiel	142
GOD USES NOBODIES Amos	146
THE FIRST TO SLEEP ON A FOAM BLUBBER MATTRESS Jonah.....	153
THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITHFULNESS Habakkuk	159
UNKNOWN BUT EFFECTIVE Malachi.....	162
FORGIVEN? FORGIVE! Matthew 18:21-35	166
GRACE: WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD Matthew 19:16 – 20:16	168
GRACE: SHARING A MEAL AND LIFE Matthew 22:1-16.....	175
GIFTS ALIVE! USE THEM! Matthew 25:14-30	177
KEY TO A HARVEST – LISTEN WELL Mark 4:1-29	180

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD Luke 4:16-22	183
ANTICIPATORY FORGIVENESS Luke 7:36-50	187
YOU DECIDE Luke 9:57-62	190
THE GOOD SAMARITAN Luke 10:25-37	193
THE BAD SAMARITAN John 4:1-42	195
THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH Acts 8	200
JESUS' WAY OF PRAYING Luke 11:1-13.....	203
THE BONUS TEST Luke 12:13-21.....	208
BE READY Luke 12:35-48.....	210
INVITATION TO SHARE LIFE Luke 14:1-24.....	212
YOU OWE US NOTHING Luke 17:5-10.....	217
JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE Luke 18:9-14	219
911 – THE TWIN TOWERS John 9 and John 11.....	223
CONSIDER JESUS	227
COMMON TRUTHS Matthew and John.....	240
MOST RELIABLE WITNESS	244
THE WORDS OF JESUS ON THE DAY HE DIED	249
RESURRECTION SUNDAY – Rejected by Man – Accepted by God	251
THE TALL SAUL AND THE SHORT SAUL	255
SAUL AND JESUS IN ARABIA	258
THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST	270
IMPACT OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS	275
PAUL'S PARABLES 2 Timothy 2:3-8	280
PRACTICAL LESSONS IN Hebrews 3.....	283
RUNNING THE RACE Hebrews 12:1-11	286
A CHALLENGE TO LIVE A NEW LIFE Our Part and God's Part	289
LIVING BY THE INVISIBLE IN THE VISIBLE.....	295
A NEW COVENANT	299
DOES JESUS HIDE HIMSELF FROM US TODAY?	304
THE FATHER'S PRESENCE.....	308
BLESSINGS ON OUR JOURNEY	313

INTRODUCTION

Who am I? A nobody God called to serve in Jordan, Lebanon and Cyprus. I learned to speak Arabic in Jordan and by living in the various countries, learned their culture while making many mistakes. God taught us through locals and missionaries. We learned to work *with* God. We owe everything to Him:

- our lives through a civil war,
- our children by adoption,
- our house through His guidance,
- our ministry through relying on Him.

To know

- God as Father,
- Jesus as Saviour and
- the Holy Spirit as teacher and
- all three as One Lord God.

My name is Neville Holmes. I was born in Cape Town, South Africa and in my childhood, I suffered from asthma, wasting away and appeared to be dying when my mother promised God that if I stayed alive, He could have me in His service. My parents moved inland to Johannesburg, resulting in an improvement in my health.

I struggled at school because I was not taught how to study, and I changed schools every six months.

My parents were not religious and only went to church at Christmas and Easter. I heard that people had found Christ and so I asked others how to find Him. A film of the Billy Graham crusade at Harringay in 1954 was shown at the Plaza Cinema in the city. There God found me, but I was not taught how to grow as a follower of Jesus, despite my enthusiasm and zeal.

I continued to struggle at school failing many times. I was sent to a cram school in the city area to do my last two years of schooling and wasted my time in cafe cinemas watching war films. Then in 1958 my father volunteered me to enter the army gymnasium for the required military training. I was glad to be there when my results became known. I had failed everything. However, while I was in the army, I was able to take evening classes at a Technical College and obtained four matriculation subjects. The next year, I obtained the other two by correspondence, one of them by a remark.

I started work in a building society but did not fit in. I applied to become a clerk in the railways and worked in the Chief Accountant's office. God organised that Stan Norris became the head of the office. He chose me to compile the monthly figures for every sector of the road motor section of the railways. I have the honour of being the only person in the history of that department for recording the road motor section, achieving a profit for the first time in its history. It was announced in parliament by the minister!

And so my journey begins...

PREPARATION FOR THE MISSION FIELD

Stan Norris lived in a town near the International Airport. He was once a lay preacher in the Methodist church there and when he bought the building, he ran his own non-denominational church. A godly man who lived daily, depending on God. He used to quietly teach me how God works in a person's life. He invited me to an Easter camp run by his church. The speaker was an American missionary, Don Smith, who spoke about the names of God. There I discovered that the life of a follower of Jesus requires daily obedience to God's Word, the Bible and prayer.

In 1960, an Australian missionary came to his church and Stan invited me to hear him. I had no transport. I was playing golf that afternoon. A member of the foursome could not stay for the 19th hole as he had to fetch his parents at the airport. He was my way to that meeting.

The missionary showed slides of the work and spoke about a school in the mountains that had to close because they had no young men. He said, "O if there was one young man who would go there." I felt that God told me I was that young man. Years later the missionary told me he did not remember saying that, nevertheless it was the turning point in my life.

Back at work, a friend, Neil who had studied at the Bible Institute of South Africa, told me that if God had called me then I should study there. I applied and was accepted but my parents were totally opposed. They thought I was giving up a secure career. They never knew that computers would radically reduce the labour force in the future.

Eventually they accepted my going. I paid the fees out of money saved. On arrival, I was placed in a room with a second-year student. I learned how to study by using mnemonics and started for the first time in my life to record reasonable marks in the exams every quarter. I suffered greatly from asthma and remember trying to breathe. I took a foul medicine but later prayed and told the Lord that I could not serve Him in Lebanon unless He healed me without medicine. He did.

Because I applied to be a Methodist lay preacher, I was asked to be one of the first first-year students to preach a message to all the students and staff in the Homiletics session. The students laughed all the way through my message although I was not trying to be funny. I was learning how to take a text and expound it. I liked and admired the lady students. I wanted one from the Bible Institute to be my wife because they had the same zeal and

desire to do the will of God. I met many godly students who wanted to serve the Triune God and went to different parts of the world.

I had no idea how to deal with women. Every one of the attractive ladies that I liked was liked by others and I stood no chance. As the son of an employee of the railways, I was given a free pass for travel. I travelled first class in an empty compartment so invited other female students crammed in second class to take a nap in mine. I also helped them with their luggage. The conductor objected! Nothing happened.

In 1962 the new batch of students consisted of seventeen ladies and four men. We second-years were evenly matched. Noreen who was also a Methodist lay preacher on trial caught my attention. She was, however, too good for me so I tried to avoid her. We came into contact in various ways but were restricted by Rule 5B which stated that male and female students were not allowed to co-mingle for more than 3 minutes. No walking together. No studying together. Whenever I got interested in a girl I would pray if she was not the girl of His choice, to stop the idea of a relationship. Time went by and nothing happened. My father tried to arrange a blind date in another town. I went but still, nothing happened. Noreen and I once broke Rule 5B when we walked together from a church where I had preached.

God questioned me if I was willing to go to Lebanon alone? I was not willing but after climbing Table Mountain on an outing arranged by the students, I agreed that I was willing. Thereafter I prayed that God would give Noreen to the person He wanted her to marry. Sometime later, God put His love in my heart for her, but I had no courtship skills. I did not know what to do.

The oldest mission station in Africa, Genadendal in the Western Cape (meaning “The Valley of Grace”) celebrated 225 years of service and invited students to join them for a week of teaching. All expenses covered. Four agreed to go. Two men (myself included) and two ladies (Noreen included). I did not know how to tell her how I felt. On the last day, I asked the Lord to put the right words in my mouth. I froze. Suddenly I blurted out, “I love you.” I got such a shock that I had to tell her how God had been working in my life preparing me for her. Then she said, “Would you like to hear my side of the story?” God had been working in her life too, preparing her for me. I wept. She was shocked. That is how it all started.

Back in Cape Town her mother gave me a meal to seal the capture of a male! We returned to the college and were given permission to be an official couple. My family was horrified until my father met Noreen. He really like her.

Later he offered to send me to university because he had been given three promotions while working on the Railways in that year. I applied to Witwatersrand University to do a degree for teaching. I would never have gone to university had I not learned how to study and pass exams. At the Bible Institute I achieved a pass with commendation of 65%.

Noreen remained in Cape Town as she still had her second year. Neither knew what lay ahead of us that year. She had gone to study and was preparing to be a missionary in Africa as she thought, until she met one who was planning to serve in Lebanon! She came under conviction that she was out of the will of God and this brought turmoil of heart. It lasted for years, even into our marriage but the Lord gained the victory before we adopted our daughter.

In 1963, I wrote my first-year exams. After those exams the Lord brought Noreen and I together and made it possible for her to work as a school nurse in Johannesburg while staying at the YWCA. She studied part time for a diploma in Public Health. The only time it was held.

I had three sub-majors, one of which, was Afrikaans. This was later to help me learn Arabic. I was able to pass every subject and was the only one to obtain a first-class pass in the final year in my class. My parents wanted to tell others, but I asked them to keep quiet unless asked.

Everyone who comes to faith in the Lord Jesus and is born again through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit needs to have a spiritual father. If he grows up in a believing family, he will have the example of his parents. If he is the only one that has responded to God's call, then he needs to ask the Lord to bring him into contact with a God-fearing person to teach him the relationship he needs to have with God.

Later I joined the open Brethren. My mother was upset that I had joined a sect, however, it was a very missionary-minded church. One of the elders, Harold Knocker a Messianic Jew, became my next spiritual father and taught me much about walking with God. His son John later supported us in the work. I owe much to them.

At the end of my year at the Teacher's Training College we got married on a shoestring. We had no money, no vehicle and no place to stay. The

YWCA where Noreen stayed, provided the venue, the waiters, the tables, the fruit juice punch. Ladies of the church provided the food. The minister who had brought Noreen to faith in Jesus married us and his wife took charge of the reception. We were loaned a car; I was given a teaching post and after our honeymoon of looking after a small holding, we rented a bachelor flat. The year went by quickly.

We applied to join the Lebanon Evangelical Mission serving in Lebanon and were accepted. We paid for our boat trip and travelled on the Europa to Italy and thereon to Beirut with the Ausonia. On the way we visited Luanda in Angola, Barcelona, Venice, Brindisi and Dubrovnik. Looking back, I realise that it was the only time we would visit other countries and helped prepare us for life in a foreign country. The mission representative in South Africa was very limited and unable to advise us. It would have been better to have travelled by air with far less luggage.

On arrival in Lebanon in 1968 I became the tallest of the workers and was always known as “franji attawil”, the tall foreigner. Soon after arriving in Lebanon we were sent to Amman in Jordan for Arabic study.

We arrived in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the time of King Hussein. We were taught Arabic and the culture of the people. We fully identified with our Arab hosts and discovered that our presence and that of other foreign workers encouraged them that we had come to learn their language and identify with them. We did not only learn Arabic but also the culture of the people and were taught the Bible through their culture. Later we were taught by missionaries who had been there a long time. Eventually I taught in a high school and Noreen taught nurses in a mission hospital for fourteen years.

Living in Jordan was our first time of living in a foreign country. It is part of the cities of the Decapolis in the Bible. We visited Jerash or Garasa. Ruins which have been cleaned up to reveal a forum, town square and paved road with a source of water. An underground Roman barracks had just been excavated. It is a country where one is exposed to the culture of the people. Not as sophisticated as Lebanon. The people encourage others to speak their language.

George Kelsie from the USA ran a language school employing local ladies to teach foreign students Arabic. We learned patterns of sentences. Soon we were greeting and using the Arabic language wherever we went. We were taught to memorise key verses in the Bible which we could use when witnessing. The first verse we learned was “Astatia kulla shay filmasih alathi

yuqawini” meaning “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”, including learning Arabic! We sang choruses in Arabic and a song taught by an Egyptian evangelist on reaching the lost which I still sing to myself.

We were a mixed bunch of foreigners and soon discovered that the Americans do not speak English or were horrified by our use of certain words like ass which means donkey to us but not to them. I made many mistakes in my use of Arabic words and would say things that caused others to laugh. A dog is a kelb and a heart is a qalb. Mamnuh is forbidden and majnuun is crazy. However, if one is not willing to make mistakes you will never do anything. I think some people find it very difficult to speak a foreign language for fear of making mistakes and being laughed at. That never bothered me.

We liked the people in Jordan, and I think could easily have stayed there had not God called us to Lebanon.

In Lebanon, we were housed in an old double-storey house in Shemlan. Noreen covered all the holes in the walls with plates or ornaments. We continued to study Arabic and used it when conversing with the locals.

I was asked to teach English and later Geography and the Bible while Noreen was asked by a matron Mick Zier of the Netherlands to teach nurses at a mountain hospital. She did this for fourteen years. We were given a furnished flat in a village near the school. The furniture provided had seen better days! We repainted the lounge suite white and recovered it with material from the market. My oil paintings were on the walls and tourist intended lamps adorned the flat. Others were amazed at what we were able to do with “rubbish”. I found broken models of ships and restored them.

One day in our village I saw a train using the Abt system to climb the foothills and cross over to the Beqaa Valley. I was able to buy a ticket and took many photos of the journey. Later I used them to speak about the work in Lebanon and the set was called “Steam in Lebanon”. Each city or town where there was work was slotted into the train route. It took 3 hours to cover about 40 kilometres before having a resting in the valley and the return trip. Once I went with a gap year student called Mike who later became the director of the mission.

In 1970 I met another preacher from the USA. He was also a Brethren and was a keen golfer. We discovered that the Beirut Golf Club charged a daily

rate, whether we played one game, or a full day of games. So in the summer vacation we arrived early at the golf course and played 54 holes of golf. Never to be forgotten, my fourth nine I was only two over par. I suffered from cramp after the game. Whenever I returned to South Africa, I was given courtesy of my old club for three months because I was a missionary returning at the end to Lebanon. In 1980, I was given a handicap of 15 by the same club and together with a Baptist minister won a sponsored tournament and the highest amount allowed to amateurs. I used it to buy clothes at the store sponsoring the tournament. The Lord seemed to give golf back to me knowing that it was only for a short time. Soon my rounds were in the seventies. A fellow missionary thought I could have been a professional. I said my heart was not in it but rather in reaching people.

After arriving in the Middle East, we were told that we would remain childless. Our doctor suggested adoption which the locals do not practise. They would never bring a stranger into their family as it would complicate the inheritance. I agreed provided that God gave us only those children that would follow and live lives in obedience to Him. Three times we were offered babies, but God stopped us adopting them. After six years of serving we did deputation and were given private gifts. On returning to Lebanon, we received a call to come to the hospital where we adopted our Armenian daughter and two years later, our Lebanese son. Our daughter required the help of a lawyer. The gifts given covered her fees. Both children came to faith in Jesus and seek to live for Him.

At the end of the school year there was a break of three months. A camp was held in the mountains near Ain Zalta. We had to erect tents on rocky surfaces and dig deep toilets for the boys and leaders. Highlights were hiking to the cedars overlooking the Beqaa Valley. Bible was taught every day, but the emphasis was on camp activities. Some boys camp to faith in Christ. Prizes were given for football, chess and tents.

A teacher who loved to talk about Jesus in his class when he was supposed to be teaching English wanted to be the speaker. I told him that the leaders had to dig the toilets. He told me to dig the toilets and he would do the preaching. I indeed dug them, but they were so deep the boys avoided them.

On returning to Lebanon after deputation in South Africa in 1974, we were called to go to a hospital concerning two babies. During our deputation we were given private gifts which were needed to cover the cost of hiring a lawyer with regard to adoption. We saw the two babies. One was

Armenian with deformed hands and toes the other was Lebanese. God guided us both to adopt the Armenian. The hospital staff was amazed because deformities are seen as a sign that God has punished the child. As the disciples asked Jesus in John 9. "Who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?" Jesus replied, "Neither."

Eventually Jeanette came home and made us parents. We had to adopt her in South Africa as well. She has dual nationality. A bright little girl who started speaking and reading early in life. My mother did not want us to adopt but when she met Jeanette, she said "make sure the next one you adopt is Armenian!" At the age of four Jeanette told her mother that she wanted to put her trust in Jesus. The year we adopted her was the start of the civil war in Lebanon which lasted 17 years. It resulted in a life of adventure and danger for us as a family. In the nine years that followed we had twenty-three moves to different areas and flats.

In 1976 we had to return to South Africa due to the death of two parents and while we were in Cape Town, we went to an Anglican midweek meeting. They prayed for us and from that time we no longer worked for God but with Him. We arrived back in Cyprus as the situation in Lebanon was uncertain. Then news came that our flat had been looted, that the fighting had stopped, and I should return. I returned and repaired the flat with corrugated sheets to cover the steel windows and plastic the wooden windows so the family could live there again.

Christmas 1976, we went to a supermarket which was nearby the hospital where we met Jeanette. The social worker that had given us our daughter had just returned to Lebanon. We decided to pay her a visit as we wanted another child. She knew of a baby boy that had been in the hospital for three months and of a soldier who wanted to take him. She had to persuade him that the baby had to be legally adopted. She saw us and Jeanette who was full of life and laughter and decided that the little boy should be her brother. A week later she phoned and Paul became our son and the brother of Jeanette. Some have thought of them as twins as their birthdates are so close together, but their birthdays are in fact the 14th and 15th September, but two years apart. He is Lebanese. Like his sister he was also adopted in South Africa. Both our children treat us as though we are their responsibility. They try to advise us, but we have to find out what God wants us to do. As children they often asked us to tell them the story of how we asked God to give us children and stopped us three times until He chose them. They were told they were special because they were chosen unlike other children.

I taught at a school in Ashrafiah at which Colin White was the principal. I taught Bible and English and often used Jungle Doctor stories to speak in the assembly before the start of the school day. I used to travel with our children to school every day. Later when we moved to a flat high in the mountains many people needed lifts as there were no buses. They had all been blown up. So, I used to give a variety of people a lift. A captive audience. I filled the car with reject copies of Salaam Ma Allah (Peace with God) by Billy Graham. I spoke to people about personal faith in Jesus and gave them copies of the book. Some showed appreciation. Eternity will reveal the results.

We had to return to our home country in 1980 to raise 100% personalised support. Many churches had to learn to support their missionaries monthly instead of as an afterthought. I tried for three months to change their thinking and failed. I cried out to the Lord what He wanted me to do? "Nothing. Trust Me." I did. Never to mention the subject again. God said He would fill my mouth with laughter. He raised 110% support and I led my sister to faith in Jesus the week before I left. My mouth was filled with laughter. Others asked how I did it. I didn't, God did it.

In the period of 1980 to 1984 we had many moves, in and out of areas of conflict. With all the tension and living in a climate of fear I started suffering from a reaction to the danger we were living in. It affected my teaching. Eventually we moved back to our original home. I shudder when I think of my escapades. We had large fireworks in a box. One day I lit three in a row. Bang, bang bang. All the lights in the suburb went out. Everyone thought it was the outbreak of fighting. I just said it was fireworks. Our landlord said his heart was beating furiously and he had to explain away to the militia the behaviour of this foreigner!

In 1984 the fighting resumed. One morning I had an inner spiritual release that our time in Lebanon had come to an end. Noreen starting packing everything of sentimental value. We were delivered from total disaster that morning when a rocket went through the kitchen. Noreen would normally have been in the kitchen at that time of the day.

I went to the bank to withdraw our savings. I felt the Lord telling me that whatever I gave to His work, He would multiply three times. So, we gave a gift to our local church. The rest we took as we fled once more to Cyprus.

We returned to our home country and were told to wait which we did for six months. On arrival in South Africa, I was asked to present the work and arrange deputation meetings in the country. I agreed to do that once I had

completed sharing the work with churches in Johannesburg. We stayed with my mother. In the meantime, I was told to find a house in Cape Town. After completing meetings, I travelled down to Cape Town in a yellow Datsun given by my mother.

I started to look for a house to buy in Plumstead. We had decided that the house had to have character, be North facing, three bedrooms, with a chimney in the lounge. An estate agent tried to convince me to buy a house with a bond. I was not interested. Then I met another who told me of a house that was being advertised that week. It belonged to a Baptist church and was a manse. Noreen's cousin, a builder, visited the house with me and suggested a fair price. The minister of the church accepted the cash offer which would be paid six months later. I told them I did not have any money but would give half of the deposit that month and the other half the next month. They agreed. God made it possible for us to buy our house for cash when the bond rate was 25%.

I travelled back to Johannesburg by train and showed the family the photo of the house from the newspaper advert. The location of the house proved to be important in our future and in the lives of our children and their friends.

In December 1984 we drove to Carmel near George. We stayed a few days, paid by Noreen's uncle. On the beach during an outing with a small group, I explained a passage of the Bible through the culture of the Bible lands. Those listening enjoyed it so much, I was asked to repeat it that evening to the broader congregation to increase the understanding of the culture of Jesus' time.

We moved into our house and later furniture arrived from Johannesburg. A believer at our new spiritual home gave us some furniture and was very helpful. Much had to be done with regard to the property. Much hard work. Having had to do everything myself in war-torn Lebanon, I continued to do that in our first property. Both the house and the outside buildings needed attention. The house was repainted on the outside by workers employed by Noreen's cousin. He paid for the paint and we the work. When we paid in cash for our house, I realised that what we had given as a gift to our church in Lebanon was multiplied in local currency by exactly three times as promised.

I realised that if I only spoke about the work, I would get one meeting a year per church, but if I could offer them something else like teaching them

the Bible through the culture of the Bible lands they would invite me more often. That is what happened and I dressed as an Arab in a galabiyya with my fur hat and was able to share in English and Afrikaans in various churches for twelve years. Our financial support declined because people no longer regarded us as missionaries as we were back in the country. Eventually we told our mission that we would leave the pool and live off what came in for us. This lasted for seven years. The believers from our own church continued to support us with small amounts. God made it possible for us to educate our children and even deal with special needs.

Our children did well at school. Jeanette worked hard but Paul was content just to obtain his matriculation. He was always interested in sport and used to entertain himself in the backyard of our house playing cricket. Jeanette and Mary Ann became best friends. Her friend living around the corner. They went to school and college together, both becoming teachers. Paul later on obtained a BSc degree.

After twelve years God called us to return to Lebanon. He spoke to me through **Jonah 2:8 Those that cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.** We said we were willing to return to Lebanon and the mission accepted us back into the pool of funds, but we were required to build up our monthly support.

God raised our support level. Our local church realised we were leaving without their involvement. They came to the party but missed a blessing. They had seen the problems instead of seeing and trusting God. One exception. An elder there supported us before the others woke up.

We felt that we should buy a house for Jeanette. There was one for private sale in the next street. I visited the man who said he wanted R235,000. I wished him well and went home and asked the Lord how much I should offer him if he phoned me. R200,000 cash which we did not have. He phoned and I put in our offer. An hour later he phoned again and accepted our offer. We had to find the money. We sold all our cars and gave the money to the one handling the transfer. When I asked the Lord about the amount needed, He said it would be paid by the time we left for Lebanon. It was and it was God's provision for our daughter and her family. She and her husband David accepted a call to Lebanon as teachers and served there for fourteen years. Now they are living in that house without a bond or rent. An example of God providing in advance. They sought first His kingdom and have reaped what they sowed. Like us they are living in a miracle every day.

I was asked to teach English again but later given what I was trained for: the teaching of students with little knowledge of Arabic who were taught History and Geography in English. Unlike those who studied History and Geography in Arabic and hated the subject because they had to memorise to pass exams, my students so enjoyed what they heard and saw, that they shared it with others that they met. I was able to use films, objects like rocks of various types to show that it was not just a subject but part of life. Some went on to do it at university in the UK.

Paul came to us from Scotland. His girlfriend was told by her father that she was not to marry Paul. When he arrived in Beirut, he told me that he was fed up with women and the next time God would have to bring the woman to him and she would have to make the first move. Betsy arrived from the USA before Paul and had heard about him from me. She liked Lebanese men but not the way they treated women. While Paul was sitting in his mother's health room in the junior school, Betsy walked in and suggested they go for a walk. After two weeks they wanted to get engaged. Betsy's parents approved of him and he returned to South Africa to apply for a fiancé's visa. While he was waiting, he pursued university studies in sport and was regarded as in their top 10% students achieving very high marks. He wrote to me that I needed to pray for him. I asked him what he needed. Money to do his degree. We gave him all we had. He was given a BSc degree and left to get married to Betsy.

My mother died while we were in Lebanon. I decided to tithe what I received from her estate. I gave a third of it to Jeanette, a third to Paul and a third to our church in Hadeth, Beirut. Then the people handling the estate were told there was another account belonging to my mother. It was the same amount which we had given away.

While we were in Lebanon I was told once more to put our savings there into another currency and this time it was sterling. Which rose in value just before we retired from service in Lebanon in 2002. This helped us to resettle when we arrived back in Cape Town.

A reading of [Matthew 11:25-27](#) changed my preaching. I came to the Lord as a child and asked Him to teach me fresh truths out of passages that I had read many times. I no longer preached old sermons but was given freedom to expound the Scriptures using the knowledge and experience of the culture of the Middle East to help me explain God's word.

I still get invited to speak at churches and venues and ask the Lord for something fresh to say. One church invites me when their minister goes on

holiday. I have discovered that not only do young people like visual aids but so do older people. It helps them to remember what was taught. Even now it seems people prefer simple well explained messages relying on the Holy Spirit to use as He pleases.

Over the past decade changes have taken place in our house and the house Jeanette and her family live in. In our house our son paid for the renovation of our bathroom as he was concerned about his mother getting out of the bath. It only has a shower. Then I paid for the automatic garage door making possible the use of the garage space as a workshop. Doors of the house were replaced. The kitchen was renovated. The pavement and the garden were changed. This involved a great deal of hard physical labour in paving the pavement with paving bricks discarded by neighbours. Our garden continues to flourish using well point water.

I turned the garage door into a partition and parked the car between that and the gate which has an automatic door.

I was approached by a missionary, asking if he could use the garage as his workshop. I agreed and bought work benches and vices for him to use. We have good fellowship whenever he returns to work. Our house would be ideal for his family, but the Lord would have to make that possible. When his family returned to South Africa, they had no money, no possessions, no place to stay and no vehicle. They rented an apartment but were unable to pay the rent, so their debt mounted up. The Lord made their situation a reminder of how He had provided for us when we returned from Lebanon in 1984. I felt the Lord telling me to obtain a car for them at the auction. I invited the husband to the auction, but he did not turn up. I later told him that when I got the car at the auction, I would have given him mine.

Many months later, I felt God telling me to give him my car. I refused and had a bad day. The next day I agreed and when he was in the workshop, I told him that he could have my car. I asked him what he would do with it. He said he would sell it and buy a car more suitable for the family's circumstances. I then asked him "What if I gave you the cash value instead?" He said that he would take the cash. Two days later they received it. So, the car is twice ours. It was bought and redeemed. I am still using it!

The steel window frames of our house were rusting and causing the glass to crack. A joinery of a believer was closing down and I was given a set of wooden window frames for nothing. I was shown how to remove the steel frames and insert the wooden ones. Then the asphalt floors had to be removed and cemented before being tiled. This I did on my own. The

garden had only grass and a few trees. It was redesigned with pathways paved and shrubs and trees bringing shade and beauty to the garden. My neighbour called it the garden of Eden.

We owe everything to God. Now He has called me to wait and leave it all to Him to order our next step and not to interfere in what He plans to do. In the meantime to use every opportunity to point people to Jesus. Once when I could not understand why something happened to me over 30 years ago, I was given a promise in **John 13:7 What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.** I was reading a Puritan book, and in it was that very verse except, it sparkled all around the verse. Never has that ever happened to me again. I believe it was God's way of confirming what He had promised me. Now He has called me to wait and leave it all to Him to order our next step and not to interfere in what He plans to do. In the meantime, to use every opportunity to point people to Jesus. **Isaiah 64:4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.**

In December 2017, Noreen found a lump in her breast and a specialist confirmed it was cancer. In 2018 it was removed, and she is now on medication for that.

Our lives are made up of visiting, reading, preparing, worshipping once on a Sunday. I am the char, the driver, the gardener, the asset manager, the evangelist, the work-in-progress where the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is setting me free from the law of sin and death. Noreen has that same law at work in her. She visits, composes poems and compiles books of her poetry which she calls Peasant Poetry. She is the dictator of the house. She decides when to change the sheets, what meals to cook, who to pray for and finds much of her information by consulting the internet.

We eventually served sixteen years in the Levant, followed by twelve years in Cape Town where our children completed their schooling. We were able to return for a further six years in Lebanon. While serving in South Africa I tried to teach the Bible through the culture of the Bible lands. I learned the hard way through living in that area. I was kidnapped, beaten up, lived amongst minorities and discovered the Bible through that culture.

I trust that God will bless you as you read this with an open Bible.

JNA Holmes – 2019

BIBLE CULTURE TODAY

Someone might argue that the behaviour of village people in areas of the Bible where people have not been influenced by television and foreigners could not be the same as in the Bible episodes. Living today amongst the locals, learning their language and watching their actions and listening to their words, one notices so many similarities with the people and their lives in the Bible. The greatest compliment anyone could pay another in that area is that he is a preserver of the customs and traditions of his family, which is to say "*Haafiz attaqaliid.*" People do not like change.

The following details of life in Lebanon and Jordan and Syria are also seen in the people of the Bible. God does not change. **Malachi 3:6 For I am the Lord, I change not.**

Join me as we mingle with people and share life with them.

I arrived in the Middle East in 1968 after many years of Bible study both at a Bible college and university only to discover that I had seen the truths through our Western culture. I studied Arabic for nine months in Amman the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Living among the people helped me to understand the customs and culture of the people in the Bible. In all we served 22 years in the Middle East.

We learned the hard way by making many mistakes because we did not know the local culture. Once we were invited by the postmaster of the village for a cup of coffee. We accepted when we should have declined the invitation. When we arrived, we chatted in Arabic about our origin and reason for being in their country. They made the coffee immediately. This is normally only served after a long visit and is a sign that the visit is over, and it was time to go home because they never expected us to accept their invitation. If they really meant to invite us, they would have provided a meal followed by a bowl of fruit and finally a cup of coffee. So, it was clear we did not know their culture.

If you are invited to visit, you must always decline as you realise the person is only being polite, however if you are *urged* to accept an invitation, it is an indication that the invitation is really meant.

Two people walking along a road were joined by a man who asked them what they were talking about. They asked Him if he had not heard what had recently happened to a man they looked upon who would radically change their lives. He asked them for more details. They told Him how the religious leaders had done away with Him and He was buried but news

had reached them that He had risen and is alive. The stranger reminded them of the prophecies concerning the expected one, the Messiah who would suffer and enter His glory. On reaching the house at Emmaus, Jesus made as if He was walking further because He waited for them to *urge* Him to stay and come into their home, because no-one intrudes without an invitation. They urged Him to stay with them as it was nearly evening, and they wanted to hear more. So, He stayed as they prepared a meal. He took the bread and gave thanks before giving it to them. As He did so, they realised it was the risen Lord Jesus. Jesus then disappeared. They returned immediately to tell the good news. They had urged Him to stay as it is always the case in the Arab world that people wait to be urged before they respond.

Those who are serious about being in the Kingdom of God will show it by their actions that nothing will hinder their entering. There will be an *urge* on their part. When one responds to an invitation to a meal, the host prepares far more than can be consumed because *generosity* is not according to how much is eaten but how much is *left over*.

- Jesus Himself provided food for many people twice and told His disciples to collect the leftover pieces which showed He was generous through what was left over.
- Joseph gave to each of his brothers a portion but to Benjamin five portions.
- Boaz gave Ruth roasted grain. What was left over she gave to Naomi and Naomi knew that Boaz was showing generosity to Ruth.
- Elisha was able to cater for many prophets with only a few loaves and said there would be leftovers.
- The prodigal son remembered how his father's hired servants had food even to spare.

Jesus taught that God is generous. He gives more than we can ask or think. Jesus usually does not enter any situation without being invited, except in the case of Zacchaeus. Jesus went, contrary to His culture, when He told Zacchaeus that He must stay at his house that day. He did so because He knew Zacchaeus, a tax collector, would think that Jesus would not accept the welcome of a man who dealt with the unclean Gentile Romans.

In Jordan we were invited by a Palestinian family to have a meal with them. They were refugees and had lost everything but when we arrived at their home, they started preparing the meal. A large dish was placed in front of us. It was called "mansaf" and consisted of a large tray heaped with rice

and roasted pine nuts, topped with pieces of chicken or mutton and “drowned” with hot goats’ yoghurt which smells as though someone has vomited. We used to laugh at Bible school as we said, “Where He leads me I will follow and what He gives me I will swallow”. Now it had become a reality and by grace alone, I was able to swallow (sometimes twice!).

We all sat around this tray and learned that we should recline by putting our feet behind us away from the food. We made balls of rice and chicken held together by the yoghurt and ate with our hands and not utensils. The next time I realised that the pieces of chicken acted as an umbrella and that the rice underneath would be dry. So, I scooped out the dry rice and selected untouched chicken and was able to enjoy the meal with lots of salt and pepper. My wife had no problem as she was a trained nurse and smells did not hinder her eating.

To eat a meal together is to share life and Jesus wants to come into us and eat with us and we with Him. His food, He said, was to do the will of Him who sent Him and to finish that work. So, when Jesus eats with us, He conveys to us the will of the Father for our lives. We respond by doing that will.

Jesus in **Revelation 3:20** wants to eat with us daily. His food in **John 4:34 is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish that work**. When Jesus eats with us, He reveals what the Father wants us to do. Jesus wants to share life with us but waits for a daily invitation.

Food sold in shops had to be fresh. The locals did not care for tinned food sent by various countries to help the refugees in Jordan. We ate Irish stewing steak, vegetables from Hungary and Bulgaria. Oats from the USA. Aid was sent to the refugees but sold at cheap prices. We ate well. Shopkeepers sold foreign eggs and Arab eggs. I told a shopkeeper that a hen does not cluck in Arabic or English. He replied that a foreign egg comes from Lebanon and a local egg from Jordan. The local egg was more expensive because it was fresher. So, food has to be fresh and that is why the workers in the parable needed a whole Denarius because they needed to buy fresh food for their families that day.

Bread is not regarded as food but as the utensil of conveying the food into your mouth. I was amazed to watch my Arab son tear off bread and clutch the food with it and insert it into his mouth. We never taught him that, but it was so natural to him. He loved his food!

When shopping, the buyer and seller always haggle over the price. It is expected. Never accept anything without bargaining. However, be reasonable in your offer to show you know the value of an article or service to be performed. When the transaction takes place, both are satisfied. Foreigners pay too much and the locals are very satisfied.

The father is the head of the family. No one does anything without consulting the father. Every member of the family would make it a priority not to bring shame to the family and the father. They would look to him to provide the means to further their education or provide for the family. They would work to extend the area owned by their father. Jesus said that He asked the Father what to say and how to say it. Everything He said was done with the involvement of the Father. Jesus pointed out that no-one knew the Father except the Son and those to whom He chose to reveal the Father. Only the Father knew the Son and in both instances knowing meant knowing by experience in every detail. Jesus taught that the Father knows the needs of His children and how to meet those needs. Our part is to trust Him that He is able and willing. Anxiety is an indication that faith is not evident.

Houses were made of sandstone blocks, with the area where the family slept about a metre higher than the section near the back door where the animals were kept. Jesus was born in the lower section and laid in the manger. A lamp or light is kept throughout the night to make it easier for movement at night if that was necessary, but it also serves as an indication of life.

The poor go around to the houses of the wealthy for live coals to be given them so that they too may have a fire at night to stay warm. So, to heap up coals of fire on a container on the head is to show kindness and concern for the needy.

Camps were run for boys but those that led the camps were usually foreigners who were prepared to dig toilets and perform tasks that the locals avoided. One local wanted to speak to the boys but was not prepared to help in the lowly tasks of running the camp. So, he did not participate. The locals said that missionaries must be employed so that when cleaning up is needed they will do it. Digging holes for toilets, only missionaries do that!! Cheap labour!!

Shepherds sleep in their tents surrounded by their flock. Early in the morning he will move out making sounds with his mouth. "Corr Corr cha cha tsk tsk". The sheep hear his voice and rise up all over the hillside. He

walks in front and leads them to areas where they can slowly graze. He allows them to lie down and ruminate which is regurgitating the grass, chewing it afresh and swallowing it. All of these details will come out in **Psalm 23**.

A Palestinian paid us an unexpected visit. He expected that we would give him a meal to satisfy his appetite. That very day my wife had cooked a meal of dried beans. The next day he reproached me for offering him a meal of beans. He said that if one eats beans for breakfast, he is amiir or prince, beans for lunch he is fakir or poor but beans for dinner he is hamiir or donkey! I told him that we lived a simple lifestyle and shared what we had. I told him to return for another meal. He forgot to turn up and it was his turn to feel ashamed after my wife had prepared a good meal for him.

That Palestinian had a large paunch and people will say there Urshak Ala qurshak, or he spends his money on his paunch. It is a sign of prosperity that you eat well.

It was never said of me because I have always been tall and thin. All over our village I was known as the “Rajul attawiil” the tall man or the “Franji attawiil” the tall stranger. There are not many tall people in that part of the world. I was told “Attawiil xadim Alasiir” the tall is the servant of the short. All my life I have had to deal with situations beyond the reach of my wife. I humbled myself in that society by carrying my son on my back and pushing the chair my daughter sat in. A photographer took a photo of me which he later gave me and said only a foreigner would do that.

One day we were in the south of Lebanon and I engaged in a conversation with a local. He asked me if I was married and how many children I had. Not one I replied. Why do you not marry another? Because I love my wife. He said that is good.

I disturbed our Arabic language teachers by showing affection to my wife in the lesson and when they had a fun day, they imitated me by asking who it was putting his arm around his wife.

When people first met us, they asked my wife why she married such a young man as normally men have to work and save before they marry a wife much younger. Actually, I am younger than her. When my hair turned white they asked her why she married such an old man. That pleased her.

A Jordanian man who paid us a visit told me that his wife was better than mine. He said he paid a thousand dinars for his wife whereas I received my

wife for nothing! That was the case as we paid for our own wedding. We had nothing, no car, no money, no place to stay. God is faithful.

Our landlord was a Palestinian from Nazareth whose name was Ibrahim. He was married to Lor who was half his age. I called her Cinderella. Later she came to faith in Jesus but in spite of many years of sharing Jesus with Ibrahim, he refused to respond. A good man and a wonderful landlord. We went through many years of trials together. He believed he was safe in the civil war because we were living in his block of flats. Once our electricity line was cut so I climbed the pylon and hung a cable over another line and gave power to the building. I had to learn how to fix appliances, repair cars, restore bombed-out rooms as part of life in the Lebanese civil war.

I showed him how he could make a living by producing Bible texts on wood for the tourist trade. Some of the texts he produced were: “Jesus Christ, He is, He is, Yesterday today and forever.” And “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.” The latter was one of the most popular texts on wood and I still have the original!

I could not play sport because that was shameful for an “old man” so I taught myself to paint. Not a great artist but people asked me to paint pictures for them in oil and water colour. My paintings are all over the world. However, what gives me the greatest joy is the salvation of souls and when God gives fresh insight as I study the Scriptures. The missionaries and local people and preachers taught me the Bible through their culture. The first verse we learned in Arabic was: **Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.** Including Arabic!

However, the first verse we were taught as seen in that culture was: **John 1:11-12 He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, He gave the power to become children of God.**

We would be invited to the houses of our language teachers who, when they opened their doors, would say “Ahlan wasahlan baytna baytkum”. When translated it would mean “You are with family; relax, treat this as your home and everything belongs to you.” We were told that to receive Jesus as in **John 1:12** carried the same meaning and that if we invited Him into our lives, we were in fact saying that all our belongings and abilities were at His disposal. My resources are yours. Jesus in fact wants nothing less. Unconditional handing over authority to do as He chooses.

Every village has a bread baker with a large oven. The people go there and order flat round layers of dough. They then use their fingers to press many

indentations in the dough to prevent it rising. Then olive oil mixed with thyme and sesame seeds is poured and spread with the fingers over the dough. About ten flat pieces are moved into the open oven. Soon the bread is baked. If the fingers were well used the bread will remain flat and Mana'uushi is the result. Every Saturday my family received hot Mana'uushi. An alternative would be to cover the dough with cheese after pressing down the dough with fingers. Mountain bread is different because the dough is thinner and the circle of dough much larger. Ordinary flat loaves of bread rise like a ball and then slowly sink. It must sink slowly so that the layers do not stick together but can be separated and torn off to use like a spoon or to grip the meat in your hands.

Dr Kenneth Bailey gave a series of lectures to workers in Lebanon and shared the fruits of his investigation and research as he consulted peasants in the area. He pointed out that we already knew much of what he said by our own experience and encouraged us to share these insights with the people in our sending countries in the West. He wrote a book published by Eerdmans called "Poets & Peasants" and "Through Peasant Eyes" dealing with many parables in Luke. I do not always agree with his findings but owe much to him.

I obtained an old book on the Psalms by Arthur Clarke entitled "Analytical Studies in the Psalms." Both authors sowed seeds and the Holy Spirit gave further insight which I shared with others.

All of the above aspects of life are seen in the Bible in both old and new testaments. The Parable is the method which Jesus used to convey the truths He wants us to understand but based on the culture of His day. The people at that time would readily have understood the implications. Westerners need to know something of that culture. Commentaries help but are often based on commentaries by other Westerners. The details of the Parables convey not only a central truth in each parable but also related truths and lessons. Jesus Himself explains the details of the parable of the sower. He showed that the *details* had significance and meaning. Likewise, many of the longer parables teach us about the Kingdom of God and what God is like and how He works.

Over the years, the doubts sown by theologians concerning the Bible and the person of our Lord Jesus Christ have been replaced by a certain knowledge that all Scripture is God breathed. That God is able to keep His Word from being contaminated by man and what we have as the Bible, He is able to bring people to Himself through preaching the Good News

and through reading and relying on Him. He is able to draw us even closer. It is thrilling to see how lives are changed when people come as children to Jesus no matter how old they are, and He alone gets the glory.

What follows is a layman's view using my experience of living in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus through mingling with the ordinary people and being taught their culture by others with much more experience and ability, and why they acted in certain ways. I tried to convey this in my preaching. Not only parables but passages and lives in the Bible. Especially Abraham, Jacob and Joseph.



READ

Matthew 11:25-28 Jesus Gives True Rest

These verses brought new life into my study of the Bible and the preparing of messages when invited to preach. Jesus thanked His Father that He had hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children for such was pleasing in His sight. I discovered that when I came to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth that will guide us into the truth and asked for fresh insight, that He gave ideas and understanding that was fresh and not gleaned from books or the studies of other people which I still read and study. I urge the adoption of this approach.

I know regarding the life of Jacob that I am out on a limb because so many see him as a manipulator and deceiver. I believe God gave me insights into his life which you will not find in a commentary. So, although I am constantly discovering through reading, the insights given by the Holy Spirit reveal God and His ways.

God has some wonderful insights to give on a One-on-one meeting of minds. One needs to come as a child and admit he hardly knows the Bible even though he might have a doctorate. That is why I am putting this material into print. Not for gain as it was freely given and so freely passed on. I am still a child when it comes to the Bible. I still ask the Lord for fresh insights and when they are given it thrills my spirit. Feel free to use the material.

JNA Holmes

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THE FATHER RAN

Luke 15

Jesus told His disciples that He had many truths to still teach them, but they were not able to bear them then. Later Paul would explain truths that Jesus taught, such as:

- Grace and not works by which we are saved.
- Justification by faith alone.
- Rebellion by sinners.
- Adoption practised by the Romans but not the Jews or Arabs because it would endanger their inheritance.
- Slavery due to sin.
- The role of God humbling Himself to bring about our salvation.
- The role of a Mediator and an Advocate.
- Election. Many called but few are chosen.

All these would be seen in His teaching and in many of His parables.

Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost and encountered opposition from religious leaders. He told stories of how lost people are found.

The tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. They felt comfortable in His presence. When dealing with the lost, Jesus did not refer to their past lives. This is seen in the way He dealt with Nicodemus and Zacchaeus. Jesus showed how a change could take place and a whole new life lived in the future. The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law, and the Scribes all found fault with Jesus, and complained that he received sinners and ate with them – [Luke 15:2](#). What a compliment!

[John 1:11-12](#) He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. 12 But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.

In the Middle East, to receive someone means to invite them into your home and treat them as family and allow them to relax and feel as though they were at home. If a person admires anything, it is offered to them as a present. I once took advantage of this and said I would take the carpet, table and chair! The host protested, “La la hatha bi nathariya bas mish bi amaliyya” meaning “No, no. This is only in theory not in practice!” We all laughed but it is worth considering how much of our yielding is only in theory rather than in practice.

Jesus came to His own, but they did not receive Him. As many as received Him in the way that has been stated which is to put everything at His disposal, He gave the power to become members of His family who were born of God. To receive Jesus means to give Him a blank canvass for Him to do as He likes with who you are and what you own. An invitation to Jesus that is not unconditional is unacceptable.

Jesus welcomes sinners. He expects them to share their needs with Him. As the father said to his oldest son, “All that I have is yours.” Jesus welcomes people to find Him and then eats with them. To share life with them as He reveals the Father’s will for their lives.

How did He sit and eat? He would have reclined on His left side with His legs tucked behind Him and He would have eaten with His right hand taking the food out of a large common tray doing the same as all the other guests. Eating with them meant what? In **John 4:34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”** When Jesus eats with us, He shares with us the will of the Father. Later, He would say that not everyone who calls Him “Lord” would enter heaven but only those who do the will of His Father.

Jesus wants to come into us and eat with us. He conveys the will of God to us and we respond by obeying Him. When Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, they did not see Him doing it; they only felt what was taking place. The reason for reclining in that way is because the feet are dirty and tucked away out of sight from food. One never crosses one’s legs in front which would cause the feet to point at the host. In Arab churches, people will not sit in churches with crossed legs so as not to insult the Lord.

Jesus responded to the criticism by telling three parables. His opponents were always hostile whereas Jesus emphasised why He came into our world to find and restore the lost.



READ

Luke 15:1-7 The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Why does a sheep get lost? It needs a shepherd to follow. It knows his voice and as long as the shepherd is nearby and calls out, it is secure. What does the shepherd say? “Corr Corr tsk tsk isk isk.” These are sounds that his sheep know. What can a sheep do to be found? It can only bleat: “I am lost.”

What does the shepherd do when he finds his lost sheep? He rejoices and places it on his shoulder because he must restore it to the flock. He might injure himself by falling in the dark. When he returns, he calls all in his

society to rejoice with him that his lost sheep was found. Everyone owned some of the sheep so all would rejoice that they had not suffered loss. Likewise, in heaven there is rejoicing over one that repents. We all need to repent. So, Jesus was rejoicing that tax collectors and sinners gathered to hear Him.



READ

Luke 15:8-10 The Parable of the Lost Coin

Why does a coin get lost? It is round and rolls away. It is made that way. It belongs to a necklace of coins. The loss of one ruins the necklace. Where is the coin lost? In the home. The lady sweeps the home until she finds it and calls all to rejoice that she has found her lost coin. The message is that there is rejoicing in heaven over one that repents. Our part is to repent or do a U-turn, but God's part is to seek and save the lost.

Jesus is describing us all. This applies to every one of us. The Bible says we have all gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way. We have all fallen short of the glory or will of God. We all like the idea of playing God. Being in control. It gives us pleasure to experience power and prestige through being charitable to those in need.

Two parables. Sheep lost in the wilderness and the coin lost in the home. The third parable is about a man who had two sons.

- The oldest son is lost in the home.
- The youngest son is lost in the wilderness.

A man has sons so that they will look after him in his old age. They use their inheritance to take care of the family, because it belongs to the family.



READ

Luke 15:11-12 The Parable of the Lost Son

The younger son asked his father to give him the portion of goods that was due to him which he should have used to look after his father in his old age. In Bible culture he was saying to his father, "You are no longer my father and I am no longer your son. I do not need your advice, your help, your presence in my life. I want to be self-sufficient. I want to use the money as I choose. I want to be in control. I want to go my own way. I want a sense of power, popularity, prestige, and freedom of action. I am not prepared to play the role of a son and look after you in your old age." We all want to go our own way. The son has taken away the freedom of the father to advise him, provide for him, protect him and allow him to bring pleasure to his father. All of that he has made his own. The father knows

that he has already lost this man, so he gives him the freedom to do just as he likes and leave home and use his resources just as he pleases.

The father of the son was still in control. He knew that his son needed his presence because he knew the problems of life, he knew his son would return as a failure. He would return empty handed. What he had been given would be wasted. The father knew the son would lose everything and is prepared to lose part of his estate to regain his son. The father did not reveal his feelings at the time. He kept quiet.

We are given freedom of choice but even if we are successful in life and reach the pinnacle of our ambition, we will still return empty handed.

The oldest son was also present and should have rebuked his brother and brought about reconciliation. He failed to do so which shows that the father had already lost both sons. The youngest would leave home while the oldest received his portion and stayed at home without a good relationship with his father.



READ

[Luke 15:13-16](#)

The son became aware of the mounting anger of the family and community because of his attitude to his father, so he left home for a far country to get away; as far as possible from his society, family and father.

He turned his portion into cash. He was popular at first on arrival, but his resources disappeared very quickly. No work, no income, no friends, no family. no food. There was a famine in the country, and none were being employed so he had to humble himself. He was sent as a Jew to feed pigs. Why that? The owner did not need him so offered him work that he knew a Jew would refuse. The man who had lost everything, accepted the position. He longed to eat the wild carob pods that the pigs were eating. Cultivated carob pods are turned into a substitute for chocolate but wild pods are bitter.



READ

[Luke 15:17](#)

He was starving. When he saw one pig push another out the way to eat, it reminded him of his treatment of the man he once called “Father”. He had lost everything and could not play the role of a son. So, he worked out a plan. What he remembered about his father was his treatment of servants, that they had food, even to spare and that he was generous. He accepted that he was no longer a son but maybe his father would treat him as one

of his servants. Was this repentance? He had his own plan to fill his stomach to save himself from starvation. He was dying.



READ

[Luke 15:18-20](#)

He resolved what to do, to say, to request. He acknowledged he had sinned against God. He did not deserve to be reinstated but would ask to be treated as a servant. Food in his stomach was the driving force. He had no alternative.

The young man only thought in terms of being a servant. He thought in terms of works, what part he had to play. I will go back, I will say “Make me...” It is an “I” centred solution to his problem. He had no idea what response he would get from his father. He exercised faith in his father to treat him well as a servant and started out for home. Maybe after years of service, he could save enough to play the role of a son. The idea of grace never entered his mind. Only those that have experienced grace know the meaning. Faith comes before repentance. We all turn to God expecting to be welcomed. Repentance follows because we sense our total unworthiness. When we return to God after drifting away, we know our need but only God knows the full extent required to meet that need. It is best to leave it all to Him.

So, he got up and went to his father. Where was the father? Was he sitting in the lounge? No, he was standing at the gate of the property expecting the lost son to return destitute, helpless, despised, without any sense of achievement. The father knew that the family and community had nothing but anger and scorn for that lost man. It was as though the father knew the expected time of arrival, for he saw the son a long way off. Immediately he tucked his robe into his belt and ran down the road to get to his son before anyone else. Why? He humbled himself. A man never runs in Bible lands because when he does so, he loses his self-respect.

The father was prepared to lose his dignity, self-respect, be misunderstood by his society, because what society values is not important. His son is all important. Paul wrote about Jesus humbling Himself and being obedient to death on the Cross. Jesus said He was humble and showed in His willingness to take on Himself the sin of the world. God humbled Himself to make us members of His family. He knows the majority will not understand but it will be very precious to everyone with whom He deals on a One-on-one basis.

On a personal note, we were walking past an open field one day and I saw boys playing football. My spontaneous reaction was to join them but a shopkeeper, a man in his late twenties, shouted in Arabic at me that it was a shame to play with them because I was an old man of 30 years! Anyone over the age of 25 is an “old man” and old men do not run. They walk sedately down the road. To run is to humble yourself. Men should walk slowly down the road to retain their dignity and self-respect. I humbled myself in public by running.

What did the father say to the son? Nothing. The father ran to protect the returning son from the anger of the family and community. He got to him first because no one else ran. It was a one-on-one meeting. The same as Salvation. One at a time. Just you and God. The gate is narrow that leads to life. Father, mother, son, daughter, one at a time. We are born of God when we are born again. God has to do the work one at a time. No one else knows what takes place.

He embraced his son and kissed him over and over. Previously the father did not show his feelings. Now they are evident. The father acted quickly which God always does when His appointed time arrives. Salvation or new birth is instant not gradual. A change has taken place. Dead now alive, lost now found, darkness now light.

Our salvation was accomplished when Christ was crucified, died and was buried and rose again within three days. In the light of eternity that is an instant. The father saw to it that his lost son was protected from the anger of the family, was forgiven when embraced and kissed, welcomed by the father and treated as a son not a servant. The father embraces the lost man, kisses him many times but does not say a word to him and acts before a word comes out of the lost sinner. Who can forget our first meeting with God in salvation? Knowing that our past was forgiven, and we are treated as though we had never gone astray but have the righteousness of Jesus. Joy and peace that we had never known before. The presence of the Father transforming our outlook, behaviour, attitude to others. Allowing the Father freedom to do as He wished. The young man had taken away from the father the freedom to exercise his compassion and love but in return, he gave back to the Father the various roles that the Father loves to play. He gave freedom of action back to the father. We do this when we accept that Jesus is Lord and live in obedience to Him.

1. Freedom to do as He liked in dealing with his son. To maintain their relationship.

2. Freedom to justify the ungodly by exchanging their sin for the righteousness of His Son.
3. Freedom to use His resources as He chooses to bring rejoicing.
4. Freedom to offer advice and provide the means to follow a course of action that pleases Him.

Where the Spirit is present there is freedom of action. God's love is seen in action. What did the son say to the father? What did he not say that he had planned to say?

Luke 15:19 I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

Why did he do that? He realised that the father by his actions, had treated him as his son and not as a servant. By not carrying out his plan of what to say he was in fact trusting the father to restore him to the status of a son. Note: the response of the father was unexpected.



READ

Luke 15:21

The words of the lost son were not heard until after the father acted. The decision of the heart and will to return, was most important. The words that followed the action of the father indicated true repentance. "I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son". Notice that it followed after faith, which is practical, seen in his walk back to the presence of his father. That is where miracles take place.

Not a word is spoken to the son by the father. Why not? The state of the son is clear to both the son and the father. He smells, he is barefoot, he is empty handed, he has reaped what he sowed. So, the father does not want to embarrass him but to make him feel at ease, accepted, and loved. Not a word of the past break-up, loss of resources, time wasted, potential lost. The only thought was a fresh start, as though nothing had ever happened to disturb the relationship.

Jesus taught that when a person knows God as Father, that the Father does not find fault with him and deals with him as though he has the righteousness of the one who never sinned, namely Jesus Himself. So, the Father does not find fault with us. Jesus said He would not have to speak to the Father on behalf of us, because the Father Himself loves us. God never found fault with Abraham, Isaac or Jacob, Not a word. We are complete in Jesus. All our sins and failures are covered by His blood and nothing of our past is seen or remembered.

The restored son now watches how his father deals with anyone who returns and gives him freedom of action. No conditions, no stubbornness, no self-will. The son is speechless. Overwhelmed.

The father is in complete control. He orders how the restoration takes place. No one tells him what to do or who to use. God will use events, people and problems in your life to complete the work He has begun in you. He is Lord. He reigns.

What was the first thing the father did?



READ

[Luke 15:22-24](#)

The servants were told to **bring the best robe**. Whose robe was that? The father's. The best robe, his robe, the robe of honour, right down to the ground covering even the dirty shoeless feet to cover the past, present and future. Covered with the robe of righteousness. Justified which is not just forgiven but treated as though he did not have a past, a wasted past. Jesus taught Justification by faith alone. God does it all.

When all saw the son wearing the father's robe, they would realise the father had honoured his son and they could not find fault with him. The robe would cover him completely so that nothing of his past life was revealed.

Grace in action. Totally undeserved, unmerited, the idea of works and his plans and self-centred thinking have disappeared. He is overwhelmed by the reception. At a loss for words. Never expected that. Never thought of the idea of grace.

Isaiah 61:10 He has clothed me with the garments of Salvation and the robe of righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Place a ring on his finger. It would be a "ring of belonging" to the father, a seal ring to show that wherever the son went, he would go with the power and authority of the father. We are given the seal of the Holy Spirit the moment we are born of God. He is the guarantee that we belong to God's family. In the film Ben Hur, the consul Arius gives his seal ring to Judah when he adopts him. We too are adopted into God's family. The seal is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus never mentioned the word adoption because the Jews would not have accepted it. It was a Roman custom. Even today, Jews and Arabs do not normally adopt. Jesus was adopted but only after Joseph was told to take Mary who was pregnant but not with his child. So, this lost sinner is adopted back into the family. He is a son not a servant. He is a member of the family by adoption and grace and does not have to work as a servant to gain acceptance.

Put sandals on his feet. Sandals were placed on his bare feet which showed that he had returned as a slave. Only slaves walk without shoes and when the prodigal returned, he was as a slave who had lost all. My Arab son was shocked when I walked barefoot in the street and said I was naked.

The fatted calf is killed. Why not kill a few chickens? The father pays the price for reconciliation. It was a time to heal relationships with others in the family. Jesus did not use the term redemption but this in fact happened. The price has been paid. We have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. A time of celebration, of joy in the home of the father. Never heard before and therefore misunderstood by the older brother. Songs of praise to blot out heaviness of spirit and loss of quality time.

People who have never experienced the grace of God do not understand the joy and gladness of those redeemed by grace. Hymns and songs of praise have no impact on their lives. There is no rejoicing in their hearts apart from financial or sporting success.

The Father has freedom of movement restored. When we first returned to Him, we gave Him freedom of action. We allow Him to do as He likes. Sometimes we do not understand His methods, what happens to us but should never forget it is done in a spirit of compassion of only wanting the best. Plans to prosper and do us good. He might humble us, but it is to do us good in the end. Our part is to make sure He has freedom and not restrict Him by our wanting our own way which got us into trouble.

The son returned as a failure but what did he bring to the celebration? He brought himself. The son then accepted everything that the father did. All undeserved. Grace upon grace. It is grace that saves us through faith. It is grace that keeps bringing us back. It is grace that enables us to work with God more than others. It is grace that will continue to bring about change in our character and lifestyle. The son enjoyed the results of giving his father restored freedom of movement and activity in life. Yet the son will say all that I have accomplished is what my father did in my life.

The father could not restrain himself. A time of celebration has begun. We discover how he feels when he acts to restore.

I was naked (without shoes), poor (dying of hunger), blind (thinking I could make it on my own), wretched and pitied (without a robe of covering). No one gave me anything.

That said Jesus is the condition of anyone apart from Himself.

Like the lost son we do not tell Jesus what to do. We give Him freedom of action. We allow Him daily to be involved in our lives.



READ

[Luke 15:25-27](#)

Outside the house the older brother heard music and celebration that he had never heard before. The sound of rejoicing. He was suspicious and questioned a servant who told how the father ran to meet his brother, embraced him, kissed him, restored him and paid the price of killing the fatted calf so that the celebrations could start. He refused to join in the celebration. Unbelievers cannot understand the joy of those who repent.

Who is present all the time? The father. He directs the steps taken and is involved in the finding and restoring of the lost sinner. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and He delights in his way. Remember he embraced and kissed his lost son.

What did the son do? He accepted everything. He deserved nothing but wrath and rejection. He experienced grace which resulted in his returning to his father. The Bible teaches that even the desire to return comes from God so that no one can boast about the part they had played in their own Salvation.

Thus, there are eight aspects of restoration:

1. The robe
2. The ring
3. The sandals
4. The fatted calf
5. The presence of the father in control
6. Acceptance of all
7. Grace
8. The sound of rejoicing.



READ

[Luke 15:28](#)

Both brothers did not have a good relationship with their father. Both failed in the same way. The younger insulted his father by not staying to look after him in his old age. The older failed by not sharing in the celebration and playing his role as the firstborn in welcoming back his brother.

The father humbled himself again by dealing with this lost man. He played the roles of Mediator and Advocate as he spoke about the need to restore someone who was dead and lost and is now alive and found. Jesus never used the terms of Mediator and Advocate because they would not have been understood and would only apply after His death and resurrection when all was accomplished. Jesus did teach that no one came to the Father except through Him. That He alone chose who to reveal to the Father. Today we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who speaks on our behalf.

The father humbled himself by leaving the feast in full view of the guests. Families usually avoid conflict for the sake of their honour and for their name to be esteemed. Yet the father is more interested in restoring his relationship with his firstborn than how people view the father. The father pleaded with his older son to come in and join the celebration.



READ

[Luke 15:29-30](#)

Notice how his older son responds. He does not address his father as father.

The younger one did so when he confessed his failure. The older son viewed his life as though he was a slave. Like the younger son who came back without shoes revealing his status as a slave in the way he had lived. What was important to the older son? That the father had not given him a goat so he could celebrate with his friends. Food was important to the son, the same as his brother who had spent his wealth on wild living. Feasting with his friends away from the home just like his younger brother. So, both brothers failed in the same ways. The younger publicly away from home and the older silently in the home. Why had the father not given him a young goat? Because he had not asked him. He did not have a good relationship with his father.

Where did the older son get the idea that this son of his father (note: not his brother) had spent his property with prostitutes in a far country? That is what he would have done or probably did but no one knew about it. He accuses his father of favouritism treating his brother as a hero while not giving anything to him. Fancy killing the fatted calf for a failure!



READ

Luke 15:31-32

The father speaks to his son, “My son you are always with me and all that I have is yours.” All the son had to do was ask and he would receive.

What does Jesus not tell us in this parable? Did the oldest son join the celebration? Sadly, he did not because he had the same attitude as the Scribes and Pharisees who are like him. There was no rejoicing when people were healed, cared for and encouraged by practical teaching. The older son revealed his attitude, at first by not restoring the relationship of his brother with his father, and then showed that he could not rejoice that his brother had been found and restored.

Jesus did not use the term election but spoke about his role and how in this parable the one son was found and restored and the other stayed outside because he relied on his good works, what he had done and never had a relationship with the father. Many are called but few are chosen. The Father is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. In this parable the father does his very best to find both boys but leaves them the freedom of action. The one boy went astray like the tax collectors and sinners, but Jesus ate with them to find and restore them. The Scribes and Pharisees remained lost although they heard His teaching and saw Him in action. The father tried to bring about reconciliation between the brothers but was unsuccessful. The religious people, apart from a few, refused to respond to this new teaching which did not fit their expectations of the Messiah.

The FATHER:

- Did not reveal his feelings when he was insulted by the actions of his sons. He gave to both sons the freedom to do and say as they chose.
- He was prepared to lose his possessions if it meant gaining a restored relationship.
- He was prepared to wait a long time.
- He humbled himself by running down the road and by pleading with his older son in public.
- He revealed his love by his actions. He dealt with every aspect of the havoc of sin.
- He covered the past by his robe and the present by his seal ring of a son.
- He turned a slave into a son by providing sandals.
- He paid the price for full public restoration.
- He brought the sound of celebration and of rejoicing.

- He was playing the role of the father all the time. Ordering the servants.
- He had no favourites. He humbled himself to restore both sons.
- He said nothing to the returning son. Why not? He was not concerned about what was lost with respect to possessions, time and relationship. His only thought was the present and the future.
- The father did the unexpected, the undeserved and everything needed to restore the relationship.

The YOUNGER SON:

- Insulted his father by refusing to look after him in his old age.
- Did not have a good relationship with his father.
- Left home because of the hostility of the family and community.
- Lost everything, his self-respect and his status as a son.
- His way back was the result of remembering the character of his father.
- Wanted to return as a servant to once more have a full stomach.
- Never realised what would take place.
- Never expected to see his father running to meet him before he reached home.
- Never expected his father's embrace, kisses, robe, ring, sandals, feasting.
- He left out the idea of being a servant.
- He was overwhelmed by the response of the father.
- The son received grace upon grace.

Luke 15 deals with the response of Jesus to the hostility of the religious leaders and then Jesus deals with His disciples in Luke 16.

What did He then teach them? Some might have thought that the way to live is to follow the example of the younger son. Enjoy life with wild living and then return to God and be restored. Waste your life and money on yourself. Have a good time before seeking God.

All these embryonic truths that Jesus taught are explained in detail by the letters of the Apostles of Jesus when they were writing to both Jew and Gentile who were followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and had the Holy Spirit in them to give them understanding in the things that Paul wrote which Peter said were difficult to understand.

This helps us to understand that Jesus focuses our attention on the Father whenever He taught, but later in the letters to the churches, the apostles showed how the other persons of the Godhead, the Son and the Holy Spirit play a role in our lives.

JESUS AND THE MONEY ISSUE

Luke 16

Have you never been troubled by the parable of the dishonest steward in Luke 16 following Jesus' teaching in Luke 15 of the rejoicing in heaven when a lost, dead person is restored by God? Why speak to His disciples after having spoken to those critical of His actions, in eating with and seeking to reach tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus speaks to His disciples about their use of money as His servants by telling the parable of the dishonest steward.

The rich man had an unexpected bonus crop. He thought only of himself, his needs and his future comfort. He did not realize that the bonus was a test to see how he would use it. On himself or others. Would he spend eternity alone or with others? How would he use the bonus for the rest of his life?



READ

Luke 16:1-13 The Parable of the Unjust Steward

The rich man heard from others that his Asset Manager was wasting his assets. He called in his manager and asked him if there was any truth about what others were saying. Then he told him to submit his portfolio to give an account as he could no longer be his asset manager.

The asset manager talked to himself about his future. He was going to be retrenched. He would lose his position. He did not have the strength for manual labour. That was to be avoided because it is shameful for respectable people in Bible lands to dig. He did not want to plead poverty and resort to begging which would result in shame and loss of respect. Then he realised what he could do when he lost his job. He needed friends who would treat him as a friend and care for him in the future. He carried out his plan but could foresee the outcome in the same way as the prodigal.

Remember that the manager was fired by the owner. He called on those who had agreements with his master and asked what they owed his master. They owed his master only at the end of the harvest as the economy was based on agriculture. They knew that he was the manager, but they did not know that he had been fired so they thought he was acting on the orders of his master. He asked the first how much he owed his master in olive oil and when he was told, he told the man to reduce it by 50%. Then he asked the second how much wheat he owed his master. About a thousand bushels. He told him to reduce it to 800.

What was the response of those who owed his master? Great rejoicing. Praising his master for his generosity and extolling him for his kindness. His master heard the rejoicing in public and people praising him. He asked them, “Why are you praising me?” “Because you have reduced what we owe you. We are grateful. It is good doing business with you.”

The master had a problem. If he denied that he had authorised the reduction in the debts, the praise would cease, and he would be regarded as “baxiil” (stingy). His good name was at stake. He commended the dishonest manager for he had acted shrewdly. He only thought of his future; what he would be doing once his dismissal was known. That others would welcome him and make him part of the family.

Whatever the outcome, the bottom line is that the asset manager had caused his master to suffer loss as he was only thinking of himself and his needs just like the prodigal son.

He never expected the unfolding that took place just as the prodigal son who expected to be treated as a servant was restored as a son. Jesus wanted to teach that although the prodigal son had been fully restored, he had paid a price. The master whose name was held in high esteem because of his generosity would not want to lose that esteem or lose the praise of people. He might indeed retain the service of his asset manager who in future would carefully manage his master’s assets.

In this parable the master is willing to lose in order to retain his good name just as the father of the prodigal son was prepared to lose his possessions to gain a good relationship with his son. The son could use the rest of his life to serve and love his father out of gratitude.

Thinking along that line with regard to His disciples, Jesus had to convey to them that they too would be put to the test. They were not to use God’s provision on just themselves but as God directed them because they would have to give an account. Paul said that he had made a great discovery that he was able to cope with having nothing and having plenty. He could do all things through Him who strengthened him. Money had no hold on him.

God would direct them in the use of it. They could so easily be like the prodigal son or the manager of the estate by wasting money on themselves with eternal loss.

Money can be a snare. It is deceitful. It seems to be the answer to every problem. We work to meet the needs of our families and those less blessed. As Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than receive.”

Fancy Jesus teaching that the dishonest asset manager got away with it by being commended for his wisdom just as the prodigal son got away with wasting so much of his father's hard-earned estate!

Jesus applies the parable and tells His disciples to use worldly wealth to make friends for themselves so that when it is gone, they will be welcomed into eternal dwellings by those who are there because of their preaching. Servants of God like Paul sharing the good news with the Corinthian church by being supported by others.

In both parables of the prodigal son and the asset manager, money is lost and wasted. Jesus tells His disciples to invest money for eternity. Today investments are left behind but if they are invested in the spreading of the good news of Salvation then when people depart for eternity, they will be welcomed by those who are there.

Jesus then said that if a person can be trusted with very little, he can be trusted with much. He regards worldly wealth as very little and spiritual riches as much. If you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you your own? The handling of wealth is the test. If you pass the test of handling money, then God will trust you with true eternal riches which are to be passed on to others so that they will share eternity with you. So many hoard money, which they will leave behind resulting in their loss instead of using it to spread the good news of Salvation which will prove to be their very best eternal investment that they will never lose or leave behind. Jesus said either money or God will dominate your life. One must choose.



READ

Luke 16:14-15

The Pharisees who loved money heard Jesus say this and were hostile.

What was Jesus' bank balance after 33 years? Did He leave anything behind?

2 Corinthians 8:9 Though He was rich yet for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might become rich.

Jesus is reaping a harvest of souls because He did not think of Himself but the lost. Are we prepared to lose out financially that others might gain spiritually? Lord what should I do?

Jesus clearly points out the difference between money which is deceitful, temporary and subject to loss, and the true riches God gives which is eternal, of great value and results in reaping a harvest of souls for eternity

to be enjoyed. Jesus said you cannot serve God and money/possessions. You will either love one or the other. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

End of life. God will ask. What will your bank balance be? Where will it be? What did you do with what I gave you? Why wait until you are dead before the money you have is used? Who is in heaven with Me because of how you used what I gave you?

At the moment men, both those who belong to the Lord and those to the world, are thinking where to invest and why. For their future needs and possible disasters. Rejoice when the stock market rises as it always will over time, but do you not realize that God is testing you with what you will do?

A decision must be taken. We spend our lives accumulating more and more. We rejoice when wealth increases, if only on paper because we are not using it. Are we prepared to lose out financially as Jesus and Paul did that others who are lost may be found?

Are we prepared to invest in others that God saves in other lands who will receive us when we arrive in heaven so that we will not be alone there in the many rooms of God's mansion?

How do I use what You have given me? Do I invest in stocks or people? How do I use the unexpected, unplanned bonus? God-given increase involved in God's business for God's glory.

John Wesley lived year by year off the same amount. As his income grew, he gave away more. He said increased income meant increased giving.

Missionaries usually have basic furniture and live with just what is needed. They learn to pass clothes around for the children and accept a lifestyle that values relationships rather than possessions. In these days with the pursuit of materialism, is Jesus challenging us to live trusting Him and using what He gives to make possible the finding of the lost? To be willing to serve at any age using what resources He gives us to find the lost and not be ashamed when accounting for the way we used God's money?

David said that he would not offer God what cost him nothing.

GUIDANCE BY GOD

Many of us struggle at times to discern the will of God. We have sometimes followed thoughts and impressions thinking they are from God yet as time unfolds it resulted in confusion. We belong to God as our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. However, there is one sowing confusion, doubts and ideas, who is seeking to destroy our faith and make us question the purposes of God. If he could use Peter to tell Jesus that the suffering ahead would never happen to Him then Satan can use thoughts cause us to act without seeking the will of God because we think it is a good idea. But it did not originate with God and left us confused, thinking that it was a hoax and resulting in a period of darkness of spirit.

Passages relating to the promises of God to guide us:

Psalm 32:8-9 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you shall go, I will counsel you with My eye upon you. **9** Do not be like the horse or mule that need to be curbed by bit and bridle.

Proverbs 3:5-7 Lean not to your own understanding. **6** In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths. **7** Be not wise in your own eyes.

Habakkuk 2:3-4 The vision is yet for an appointed time. Wait for it. **4** The just shall live by God's faithfulness.

Micah 7:8 Do not rejoice my enemy. When I sit in darkness the Lord will be a light to me.

Psalm 73:23-24 You will hold me by my right hand. **24** You will guide me with Your counsel.

Psalm 119:105 Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Isaiah 30:20-21 The Lord gives the bread of adversity or the water of affliction. **21** Your ears will hear a word behind you saying "This is the way, walk in it."

God has given His Word. It is a living Word which the Holy Spirit uses but even Satan can use that same word to sow confusion as he did when tempting Jesus. So, it needs to be read, understood and memorised, for the mind and with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discern the will of God.

God will never tell us to do anything contrary to His will recorded in the Bible. God will get to us through His recorded Word and through the Holy Spirit using that Word and this is where there is a problem. To discern thoughts and impressions.

- Are they from our deceitful minds (a term used by God when rebuking false prophets)?
- Or from the evil one who seeks to devour, cripple, confuse, discourage, destroy faith, create doubt, bring division, break up marriages, end fruitful ministries?
- Or is it the Holy Spirit directing His servants in fruitful lives and service?

The major turning points in our lives are through the initiative of God. Our salvation was totally God's doing. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Thereafter there are major turning points in our lives. God has given us His Word, His Holy Spirit, His teachers of the Word, the Church of believers all to play their part. The Lord Jesus Christ will want to be involved in our daily living. He will not intrude. He gives us freedom of choice daily. We need to restore to Him the freedom to direct us. His presence makes all the difference.

We do not tell Him what to do but leave it to Him to give us insight, ideas and skill that we need. We all know how, when we turn in frustration to the Lord, that He gives the solution. We wonder why we only turned to Him when we messed things up and needed to be extricated. Nothing is too little or trivial or too big and crucial to involve the help of the Lord.

A trivial matter like renovating the kitchen: I consulted experts but had no peace. I prayed and asked the Lord why? Because you never consulted Me. What must I do? Why not do it yourself? But I've never built a cupboard in my life! I told my wife and she was horrified, but she encouraged me, and she still enjoys her kitchen to this day. We think we know everything, that it is common sense, so we go our own way.

A big change will take place in our lives. The hymn called "I surrender all" is so easy to sing, yet so difficult to carry out. Are you really willing to give up being with family, friends, your fellowship, your comfort zone for the unknown to make Jesus known and experience living in a third world country – alone? Fruit and vegetables and meat hanging in the open, no supermarket. Poor medical facilities, lack of water and power. God that takes the initiative and makes His servants willing to obey His call.

God will guide through His Word, through circumstances and slowly over time through showing there is no alternative. God does not act hastily. R.T. Kendall learned that God is never late or early but always right on time to teach us that the Lord reigns. He is in control and in charge of every situation. He teaches us that those who trust in Him will not act hastily. Those who wait in faith for Him will be blessed and not be put to shame.

There are times when God guides in very strange ways that seem contrary to common sense and are mind boggling. He has an ultimate goal in mind but there are lessons to be learned along the way. He might choose to use it as that person's thorn in the flesh or spirit. To teach him to live by faith. Trusting that God knows what He is doing.

It is important to realise that God takes the initiative in Creation, salvation and our lives. As He did in the lives of Abram, Moses, Samuel and David. He came into our world at His appointed time. He waited until the language of the known civilised world was Greek, with colonies all over the place and Rome had brought relative security through roads and sea lanes. God waited and expects us to do the same to wait for His time.

He delivered His people from slavery through His servant Moses (Who am I?) and then led them out by a mighty hand and outstretched arm (the arm of the Lord, Jesus) with a great victory over the enemy. Then He provided for over 2 million in the desert with water, bread, meat and led them by day and by night. When the pillar of cloud moved, they moved. When it stopped, they stopped. The same with us. There is a time to wait. A time for action but God takes the initiative. God delights to work in ways and people that are despised and rejected by the world.

God used:

- Matthew, to record not taxes, but the life of Jesus.
- Peter, a sinful man, to catch men.
- Saul of Tarsus, "Suffer for Me".

Every time, God made the breakthrough. God is still doing that today. He can call you any time to anywhere. Unfitted you see only problems, but God enabled He sees only possibilities and opportunities. Salvation from sin is entirely the work of God. Only God can save and cause people to be born again. He will engineer circumstances, use His servants and work in such a way that the lost sinner will know that he is alone with God. He is given saving faith and reaches out to God that he never knew before but expects to be heard and saved.

The trouble is, we forget the miracles God has performed and are overwhelmed by the next big problem. God never changes and He has no favourites. Never gets involved unless invited. In my case, God has always taken the initiative and has had to wait until I submit every decision to Him. It was to increase my confidence in Him the next time. As a result, we owe everything to the Lord. Waiting has always been the most difficult because I like to be finished with a project.

Often, we have thoughts and convictions but do not know the source. From a deceitful mind or from the devil or from the Holy Spirit. The point is, is that if it is from the Lord, it will be confirmed. Obey Him, expecting it to be confirmed.

Isaiah 64:4 ...God acts on behalf of those who wait for Him.

We must know that this is what He would have us do. Then our part is to trust Him alone.

He has given an open door of service for us all. Use it while it stays open. Get on with the task allocated until the next major move.

God stopped Saul on the road to Damascus and sent him into Arabia for 3 years to teach him personally what He had taught the 12 disciples. In daily living and reaching decisions, we need to ask for His help. So often we act on our own and only turn to Him in frustration when things do not work out. We wonder why we did not first consult Him.

Guidance is a mystery. We do not hear an audible voice. We read the Bible, God teaches us and sometimes imprints the words in our minds and hearts and moves us to action. Sometimes He closes doors but opens others. Paul was not allowed to go to Asia but heard a man from Macedonia calling for help. God still does that. God still uses dreams and visions.

He is able to keep you from falling. If you still insist on your own way, He will wait until you stop relying on yourself but only on God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit led an assembly: “Separate Paul and Barnabas for the task I have for them”.

Jonathan Edwards once said: “The Sovereign Redeemer moves in a different way with every generation and we must discover what way He is moving in the new generation and then walk in step with the Holy Spirit”.

Recognise your gifts. Not all are called to teach, preach, evangelise, lead or heal, but everyone is called to play the part God has for them. Gifts should be recognised, and every opportunity given for the next generation to exercise those gifts. There is no simple book of rules on guidance. We are all different and God deals with everyone in a different way. It is very personal, but God still takes the initiative.

He has given us His Word, His Holy Spirit and our minds to “test the spirits”. God still knows what to do and how to provide. He expects us to involve Him in our decisions and make sure that it is His will and not act hastily or follow any dreams or ideas.

ABRAHAM AND JACOB

Abram was 75 years old when called by the Lord God to leave his area, his society for an unknown destination which God planned to give him and his descendants. He obeyed and followed what is known today as the Fertile Crescent (an area named because of the proximity of water around an area of desert) because he had flocks and herds.

God called Abraham to live by faith, to trust God at all times, even when it seemed impossible. Abram did so and his faith in God was reckoned as righteousness. **Romans 4:1 Abraham our forefather according to the flesh.**

Why did God call him? God Himself gave the answer in **Genesis 18:19 For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.** So Abram left. Lot his nephew accompanied him. Thereafter God said nothing while he slowly moved his family and livestock in areas where there was water and food for the animals. When he arrived at Shechem, God spoke and promised him and his descendants the land around him.

He is the father of us all. He believed in God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. He did not weaken when he considered his own body. He grew strong in faith giving glory to God. He was fully convinced that what God had promised, He was able to do. Our faith will be reckoned to us as righteousness who believe that God raised Jesus our Lord from the dead who was put to death for our trespasses but raised for our justification.

Throughout the life of Abraham and Jacob and Joseph there were periods when God was *silent*. This is a silence which all who have followed, and obeyed God have known. But there are two different types of silence when God deals with His children. The one is a *silence of approval* when His child is doing His will.

But when Abram discovered Shechem was enduring a famine, he went on to Egypt without consulting God. This time God was silent again but a different silence. Abram acted out of experience as a shepherd. When we are determined on a certain course of action, we lose the active presence of the Lord because although we might pray about the matter, we have already decided what to do. The *loss of the joy of the Lord* is an indication that we are going our own way.

God then told Abram that He had brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees to give him the land he was living on. God had acted in Ur prompting Abram to leave before he was called when Terah, his father decided to stay in Haran. That promise was confirmed by the establishment of a covenant based on sacrifice in which God said everything that He would do to bring that about in the future. A promise backed up by another promise.

Ten years after God had called him in Haran, he and Sarai were still childless. His wife was past childbearing age, so she suggested to Abram that Hagar should sleep with him and bear him a child. Abram agreed, instead of consulting God, and Hagar bore him a son which he called Ishmael. Both of his parents thought that Ishmael would be the way to fulfil the promise of God. Abram was 86 years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael. He then experienced the *silence* of God for 13 years. That silence was muffled by the presence of Ishmael. Both parents thought that the matter of being childless and the shame of not having an heir had been removed. Abram was instructed by God to send Ishmael away.

When Abram was 99 years old the Lord appeared to him. The covenant of *circumcision* was instituted by God before Sarai bore Isaac. It was to teach them not to trust in themselves but only in God. Not to try to help God out as they did with Hagar but to leave it entirely to God to carry out His purposes which could not be thwarted by the actions of man. The Lord promised Abraham and Sarah a son which caused them to laugh. They were to call their son Isaac meaning “laughter”. A daily reminder that nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old at the very time God had promised Abraham. Isaac replaced Ishmael as the firstborn of Abraham. Isaac was the son of promise. God doing the impossible and there could be no boasting by either Sarah or Abraham. Abraham’s children would be through Isaac. Children not through physical descent as in the case of Ishmael but children of the *promise* of God as in the case of Isaac.

When Abram returned from defeating those who had taken Lot captive and brought back the possessions, he gave a tenth to Melchizedek. He felt that was God’s portion. He was a cheerful giver and refused to take anything belonging to the king of Sodom lest the king boast that he had made Abram rich. Abram wanted to say at the end of his life that all he had, had been given by God and he wanted nothing from an evil man.

Through his giving, Abraham showed God that his relationship with the Lord meant something more than words to him. Talk and words are cheap.

Salvation cost God His Son and He makes it available without cost on our part. We give the minimum of a tenth and trust God to cover our needs with the remaining 90%. King David said he would not give to God that which cost him nothing. He was a man after God's own heart.

Abraham told his servant to get a wife for his son Isaac. That he was not to get a wife from the Canaanite women but one from his own family. A cousin! The servant of Abraham trusted God to lead him and prosper his task. Trust God to bring the person of His choice into your life. Submit every relationship that you have to the Lord as to whether it has His approval. God only gives His best. Be prepared to wait.

Marry a child of the devil and you will have trouble from your father-in-law. Be faithful to the wife of your youth.

When Isaac was 40, the servant returned with Rebekah, and they married. After 19 years of marriage without any children, Isaac prayed to the Lord who answered his prayer and Rebekah discovered that she was to be the mother of twins. Rebekah asked the Lord why she was experiencing discomfort in her womb? **Genesis 25:23** The Lord said to her, **“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”**

The passage in Romans 9 helps us.



READ

Romans 9:7-21 Israel's Rejection of Christ

Abraham was 160 years old when Esau and Jacob were born in the camp. When Rebekah gave birth to the twins, the firstborn was Esau, named according to his appearance, which was hairy. The second was named Jacob which means the one who takes the heel or supplanter because he was clutching the heel of Esau. Later he would supplant Esau who became a hunter and catered for Isaac's love of venison. Isaac loved Esau. Rebekah loved Jacob, who stayed in the tent with his mother and learned how to cook lentil stew.

They would have lived in a community. Isaac was responsible for looking after Abraham. For 15 years the camp at Mamre had Abraham, Isaac, Esau and Jacob. **Genesis 35:27** Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. **Hebrews 11:9** By faith Abraham sojourned in the promised land dwelling

in tents with Isaac and Jacob. In this time, Abraham would have taught Jacob about his life and how God led him.

Jacob is described as a quiet and complete man living in tents. He would have been told by his mother the promise that had been made that he would replace Esau as the firstborn. The firstborn of a family in the Middle East is usually given the best education and heads the next generation of the family as he expands the area controlled by the family. He maintains the values, beliefs and traditions of the family.

Esau never turned to the Lord God. There is no mention of God in his life or that of his descendants. Esau did not consult his parents before getting a wife thus showing that he did not care for their values and way of life. Those women made the life of his mother miserable.

Isaac lost the value of a close relationship with God, but Jacob needed a father to teach him about a relationship with the only God. Someone who would teach from experience and whose life had been changed by the Lord. Abraham took over the role of Isaac and became a spiritual father to Jacob. How do we know this? **Genesis 28:13 God spoke to Jacob for the first time and said. "I am the Lord the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac."** God recognized that Abraham had taken the place of Isaac, the natural father of Jacob. Those that are raised in homes where God is not honoured, need spiritual fathers to guide them on their pilgrimage.

Jacob is seldom viewed in a favourable light by commentaries and preachers but that is because they do not know the culture of the Bible lands. Often Scripture records that the God of Jacob is our refuge or happy is he who has the God of Jacob. He did not have to plan or scheme to become the firstborn, he just stayed at home and cooked stew.

Abraham and Jacob spent time alone talking about things that really matter. Later, Jacob and Joseph would spend time together and Joseph would learn all about his grandfather, Abraham, and the lessons that his father Jacob had learned. It required time. This accounts for the impact Abraham had on Jacob who had an impact on the life of Joseph so that he was an exceptional person whom God used.

Jesus spent time talking to Mary while Martha was serving and said that Mary had made the right decision to listen to Him. Nicodemus spent time with Jesus and later defended Him and together with Joseph of Arimathea, took care of the body of Jesus. Jesus spent three years teaching His disciples. Three years of study listening to God before they were sent to serve. Saul

of Tarsus spent three years in Arabia receiving from Jesus. Receiving by revelation and having all his questions and theological problems cleared up, such as how could a man dying on a Cross which makes Him cursed be the Salvation of sinners? Jesus took on Himself the curse of all those who break the law of God. He was cursed for us that we might be blessed in Him with everything that heaven has to offer.

What are you going to pass on to your children? Lasting teachings that will have an impact on their lives? That will affect the way they will think, behave and believe. That will cause them to value what in life? Unless they have a good relationship with, God their life will be a waste no matter how successful they are in sport, business or accumulation of assets.

There is no merit in exercising faith. Faith is simply the connection to the power of God. God's mercy and grace reckoned Abraham's faith as righteousness. Grace is God's decision. His way. Old bank notes stated: "I promise to pay the bearer on demand." A promise made. The bearer believes the promise will be kept.

Faith is the condition not the ground of salvation. God is the One who makes the promises and we trust Him to carry them out. His grace gives us confidence in Him. Through faith we obtain the righteousness of God. Christ fulfilled the law of God and through faith in Him and His death on the Cross we receive His righteousness. As though we never sinned.

The only way to live a life that pleases God is to live by faith in God to carry out His promises. To be the yardstick in every stage of your life. The just shall live by faith. There is no other way. If you do not stand by faith, you do not stand at all. If God calls for your life to be uprooted, obey. If He says stay, stay. Wait for Him to order your life. Sometimes Abraham went astray but God got him back on course.

In obedience to God, Abraham was prepared to lose out by:

- Giving Lot the first choice.
- Giving the spoils to the king of Sodom; he wanted nothing from him.
- Sending Ishmael away.
- Offering up Isaac.

Obedience to God resulted in blessing and the assurance that God was with him. Seek not how best you may prosper but seek first to obey God and allow Him to order your life. "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart". The danger is trying to do it on your own. You may prosper materially but lose out spiritually and that for eternity.

Trust God to do the unexpected. Three men came to Abraham who knew it was the Lord God. A mystery but he hastened to provide a meal for them. He humbled himself when he could have delegated a servant, but he knew he was dealing directly with God. God had called him to leave his society and family. God had assured him of His presence. and made promises to him that only God could fulfil: Isaac, not Ishmael, the son of a hasty, not thought-out action. Like Abraham, Jacob had to wait for Rachel to give him a son. He told her that it was not God who had stopped her having a child. When Joseph was born, he was the son of his old age and God had planned it that way so that he would spend time with Jacob learning spiritual lessons and his relationship with the Lord. Expect the unexpected with God. Do not allow the humanly impossible to dominate your thinking but trust the God who calls into existence those things that do not exist.

God called me when I was without direction and purpose in life. He organized my education to meet the requirements of an area of service. He gave me, who had no idea of how to court a girl, the best student at the Bible college. He gave us children and provided the means to adopt them in advance because a lawyer was required. He gave us 110% personalized support when it was required without any appeal or mention of money. He directed me for years in advance making it possible for us to buy a house without a bond. God provided for us for 7 years without a salary. He made it possible for us to buy a house for our daughter before she got married or left to serve Him. He called us to return to Lebanon and made it possible.

Abraham shared with Jacob something that was very personal, when he was told to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. It was a One-on-one event with no witnesses apart from Isaac his son. A very special personal experience. He discovered how God had already made provision of a ram instead of Isaac. To teach Abraham that his best was not good enough or acceptable to God who Himself would provide what was acceptable.

Do not limit God by thoughts of common sense. Think not in terms of your limitations. If God calls you then trust Him to make it possible to go. You are more important to God than what you do.

Luke 10:20 Rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven.

ADOPTED LIKE JACOB

What do Jacob and I have in common? Both Jacob and I owe everything to God for our salvation, our calling and our preservation. Both of us have had strange dealings to teach us about the ways of the only God who wrought changes in our lives and the lives of others.

Why me? I am a nobody that God radically changed and called to serve in the area where Jacob grew up and lived. God needed to deal with me as He dealt with Jacob.

Am I qualified to write on this subject? I lived for 22 years in the areas of the Bible, namely Jordan, Lebanon and Cyprus. I was taught by older missionaries, local people and learned much by living in the area by experience. What follows was not gleaned from books as so many theologians passed on what others say.

Why examine the life of Jacob? He is often written about by Western writers who fail to understand that the Bible was compiled in the lands known as the Levant or Middle East.

Jacob lived in the lands of the Bible and his life is best understood in that culture.

The purpose of this chapter on the life of Jacob is to correct the false conclusions by so many Westerners who view Jacob through their culture. God never found fault with Jacob. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What He was able to accomplish through ordinary men, He is able to do today.

Jacob lived in the early second millennium BC. He was a twin born after his brother Esau to his mother Rebekah and father Isaac. When Rebekah gave birth to the twins, the firstborn was Esau, named according to his appearance, which was hairy. The second was named Jacob which means the one who takes the heel or supplanter because he was clutching the heel of Esau. He lived in a camp of herders at Beersheba. Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, lived in the same camp because his son Isaac had to care for him in his old age. As the firstborn, Esau would normally receive the blessing of being in charge of the next generation on the death of Isaac. Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating venison which Esau brought to the camp.

Rebekah loved Jacob who stayed in the camp with his parents while Esau was out hunting game. Jacob is described as a complete man staying in the tents. God is never mentioned in the life of Esau nor in his descendants. Later in Malachi the Lord said, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated".

It reveals that Isaac did not bring Esau any closer to God. He enjoyed the food but did not teach Esau the way to have a relationship with God.

Later God would say through Moses in **Exodus 33:19** “**I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.**”

It does not then depend on man’s effort or desire but on God’s mercy. God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy and He hardens whom He wills to harden. God has the right to make people differently for His own purposes.

We meet many people every day of our lives. We have the opportunity to ask them a question about the purpose of their life. Where will they spend eternity? Be armed with suitable booklets explaining how the problem of their going their own way can be replaced by living according to the will of the Father. Sometimes God brings people back into your life but with gratitude that meeting you, caused a radical change in their life when they were born again through faith in Jesus.

Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac born, he was 160 when Jacob was born, and he died aged 175.

Once he had been able to converse and understand, Jacob would have wanted to know about the life of Abraham. As Jacob developed, he must have brought pleasure to his grandfather. Eventually the time arrived to find out about the life of Abraham and find out why he was so different to Isaac who seemed to have lost his way spiritually. Many of Abraham’s actions are seen in the life of Jacob.

Imagine the conversation based on the life of Jacob and the details of the life of Abraham that Jacob would have passed on to his son, Joseph, who would have recorded them all.

Jacob: O my father what was your origin?

Abraham: I came from Ur of the Chaldees, but God called me at Haran to leave my family and go to a land that He would show me. He promised to bless me and make my name great, my family a great nation and a blessing so that all peoples would be blessed through me. So, I left with Sarai and my nephew Lot. God called me to act contrary to our culture. We would normally stay in one locality establishing the family fortune. As the size of the family so it would take control of a larger area. The call of God requires obedience to the first step of willingness and thereafter the plan and purpose of God for his life will unfold step by step.

Jacob: How did you know where to go?

Abraham: I have flocks and herds, so I had to go where there is water and grazing. God said He would show me.

Jacob: How old were you when you heard the call?

Abraham: I was 75 years old.

Jacob: How long did it take you?

Abraham: We moved slowly with our flocks following the Fertile Crescent. In our part of the world nothing is done hastily. We went south through an area called Lebanon as many streams flowed from the mountains to the great sea. There is a river there called Nahr Ibrahim (Abraham River).

Jacob: Did you hear from God as you slowly moved south?

Abraham: No, because I was doing what God required of me and only expected to hear from Him once we arrived. God has only to inform us of His will once and then requires that we carry it out until He calls for a change of direction. When we move out of His will, the lack of His active presence and His peace is a clear indication of a need to seek His counsel.

Jacob: What land was promised to you? How did you find out?

Abraham: When I arrived at Shechem the Lord appeared to me and told me that area would be given to me and my descendants.

Jacob: What did you do when you arrived at Shechem?

Abraham: After the promises God made, I built an altar to worship Him.

Jacob: Did you stay there?

Abraham: No, I moved further south to find grazing but there was a famine in the land, and I did a foolish thing. I did not consult the Lord but left the area for Egypt.

Jacob: Were you not afraid of going into an area without the Lord?

Abraham: Yes, I was, and decided on a strategy to call Sarai my sister. Pharaoh took her but the Lord sent health problems which made him realize that Sarai was my wife. He had given me much livestock and servants. What I missed was a word from the Lord. I thought the Lord would not be present there. I have discovered that He is the only God and is present everywhere. Wherever you go the Lord will be with you. There was nothing

but silence because my moving to Egypt was not an act of faith and obedience. Hagar was acquired there.

Jacob: Where did you go after Egypt?

Abraham: I returned to where I had pitched my camp near Bethel and once more called on the Lord. I had no desire to pray or worship while I was in Egypt because I came to realize I had taken the initiative and not the Lord's.

Jacob: Was Lot, your nephew, with you all this time?

Abraham: Yes, and there was trouble because of the abundance of livestock. I told Lot to choose where to set up his own camp and I would go elsewhere. He chose what was apparently the most fertile area with abundant water resources.

Jacob: Did you not think you lost on the deal?

Abraham: No, because soon after Lot left, the Lord appeared to me and assured me that all the land would belong to my descendants and He told me to move my camp from place to place. Hearing the Lord and His promises meant much more to me than fertile lands.

Jacob: Did Lot prosper?

Abraham: For a while, until Chedorlaomer and other rulers gathered together and attacked Sodom and Gomorrah, capturing Lot and his family with all his possessions. I heard about it, so I went to rescue him. We attacked by night and were able to deliver him and all the other inhabitants of Sodom. Lot should have realized that living in Sodom would result in loss, but he stayed.

Jacob: What happened to Sodom and Lot?

Abraham: They were very wicked, and the Lord gave them ample time to change. Eventually the Lord decided to destroy Sodom and told me what He was about to do. I prayed for the city but eventually stopped when I thought that if there were less than ten righteous people then Lot had not been a good witness. He and his two daughters alone got out alive. His wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Be warned. Materialism and prosperity are not signs of God's blessing. Lot lost all. His daughters had sons who are the origin of the Ammonites and Moabites.

Jacob: Did anyone meet you after you returned from your victory?

Abraham: The king of Sodom and a priest of God Most High, called Melchizedek, came from Salem and brought me bread and wine. He showed concern for my welfare. This priest revealed to me God Most High was the same as the Lord who called me and had given me the victory.

Jacob: What was your response?

Abraham: I gave him a tenth of everything because I felt that was God's portion for helping me. In your life you should do the same when God blesses you.

Jacob: Where did Melchizedek come from?

Abraham: I do not know his origin. I never met him again.

Jacob: There must have been a great deal of loot?

Abraham: There was but I decided in advance I would not take anything in case the king of Sodom would claim that he had made me rich. At the end of my life I wanted to know that I owed all to the Lord and not to evil men.

Jacob: How did you feel after that?

Abraham: I thought about the kings I had defeated who might retaliate. But God graciously told me not to fear as He would be my shield and protect me. He also said my reward would be very great.

Jacob: What was your response?

Abraham: I told the Lord that I was not interested in flocks and servants. I was still childless. The Lord said that He would give me a son. He took me out of the tent, and I saw the stars. He said that my descendants would be like the stars. I believed the Lord and He accounted to me righteousness. Undeserved and a gift of grace.

Jacob: Wow! What did you do?

Abraham: I believed that God would carry out His promise and my faith was reckoned to me as righteousness. The Lord told me to offer a sacrifice. I prepared the animals and drove away those trying to spoil the event. I fell asleep and in my dream, the Lord told me that my descendants would be strangers in another land and would become slaves for four hundred years, but He would

deliver them. He said I would live to a ripe old age. Fire went through the sacrifice and the Lord promised me this land. He would do everything.

Jacob: Where did you eventually settle and make your camp?

Abraham: In this very area of Mamre near Hebron. Here I erected an altar to worship the Lord.

Jacob: I notice that you built many altars to worship God. Why do you do that?

Abraham: The only God the Lord who appeared to me when He called me is worthy of worship and I needed a place to offer a sacrifice in honour of Him. He is worthy of the best. In time, I learned He wants our obedience.

Jacob: How old were you when Ishmael was born?

Abraham: About 86 years old.

Jacob: What part did Sarai play in the birth of Ishmael?

Abraham: Sarai thought that if she could not have a child then the Lord needed some help to fulfil His promise, so she allowed me to sleep with her servant Hagar. That brought trouble to the family. The Lord later told me that Sarai would bear a son. We thought it was impossible, that is why we laughed, and that made God call him Isaac (laughter) to remind us that nothing is too hard for Him.

Jacob: Why did Ishmael not stay with your family?

Abraham: Because God said that He would work through the line of Isaac.

Jacob: Have you ever seen the Lord?

Abraham: One day three men came to my tent. In fact, it was this very tent. I knew it was the Lord and I served them personally with the best of everything. Cakes and bread, a good calf, yoghurt and cream cheese. They ate and then told me Sarai would have a son. The Lord spoke to me personally although there were three men.

Jacob: How much longer did you wait for my father?

Abraham: Another 14 years. Years of silence. From a human point of view, it seemed the Lord had forgotten. All we did was wait.

Jacob: How old were you when Isaac, my father, was born?

- Abraham: I was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. Isaac was born at God's appointed time. I called him Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day as taught. I realized God had done everything with no boasting on my part.
- Jacob: If Ishmael was your firstborn, how did Isaac take his place?
- Abraham: God told us to send Ishmael away. It was a sad day for me. So Isaac took the place of Ishmael as my firstborn. It was the Lord who told me that through Isaac, the child of His promise, that my family would grow. You could take the place of Esau as the firstborn, but Esau has to agree to the idea.
- Jacob: It must have given you pleasure to see Isaac grow up after you lost Ishmael?
- Abraham: Indeed, but one day the Lord told me to take Isaac to the region of Moriah and offer him there as a sacrifice.
- Jacob: Did you not rebel against such a request?
- Abraham: No, because God had made so many promises and He never fails to keep them so I knew that somehow even after I had carried out His command, Isaac would be restored to me.
- Jacob: But that was contrary to all the promises of God, so how is it possible that Isaac is still living?
- Abraham: I took Isaac to the place of sacrifice and when Isaac asked me where the sacrificial lamb was, I told him that God would provide. As I was about to kill Isaac the Lord intervened and provided a ram caught in a bush to take the place of Isaac. He showed me that my best was not good enough, that only what He provides is acceptable to Him. I called the name of the place Jehovah Jireh, which means The Lord Will Provide.
- Jacob: What did God have to say to you?
- Abraham: He repeated His blessing and promises about my seed as the stars and sand of the sea. I believe Him.
- Jacob: Why was your name changed from Abram to Abraham?
- Abraham: Because of the birth of Ishmael and eventually Isaac. Many nations would be formed, and I would be the father of many of them. Others would come to trust the Lord.
- Jacob: What was the sign of the covenant between you and God?

Abraham: Every boy at the age of eight days was to be circumcised. It was a sign of no confidence in human nature and ability. We live in submission to Him and His will for our lives. It would remind everyone that God does not rely on man to accomplish His purposes. If He could give a child to a mother aged 90 and a father aged 100 then He can do anything. I first exercised faith before the sign was given. Thereafter we were not to rely on ourselves but on the Lord.

Jacob: How did Isaac get a wife?

Abraham: It was my responsibility to provide a wife for him because that is the role of every father. I sent my servant to get a wife for him from my relatives in Mesopotamia. When he arrived, the first woman who came with her pitcher to the well was Rebekah, your mother. As you know she is both beautiful and bright. Her brother Laban is shrewd. When you get a wife, you should marry a relative and not a local woman.

Jacob: Did you marry after the death of Sarah?

Abraham: Yes, I married Keturah and had six sons but sent them away from the camp.

Jacob: Where should we bury you?

Abraham: In the cave of Machpelah which I bought and where Sarah is buried.

Jacob: I want to thank you for teaching me and taking the place of Isaac as my spiritual father. Your God will be my God. Your values, my values. Your relationship with the Lord mine. Any further advice?

Abraham: Wait for God to unfold His purpose for your life. Trust only in Him. He is the only God.

Jacob lost the company and teaching of his spiritual father at the age of 15. He started to carry out what Abraham had taught him. He kept a record in his mind which accounted for his actions later in his life.

What Abraham passed on to Jacob:	What Jacob learned and how his life reflected Abraham's:
At the age of 75, Abraham was called by the Lord God. He left the family area for the unknown.	Jacob left home aged 80 to unite with family in Haran, an unknown area for him, to find a wife.

Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael, lost his status and, was replaced by Isaac.	Jacob took the place of Esau as the firstborn.
Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek.	Jacob promised God a tithe.
Sarai gave Abram Hagar, her maid.	Jacob accepted Bilhah and Zilpah as mothers of his children.
Abraham told Jacob about the Lord his God.	Jacob heard that the Lord was the God of Abraham. Not new to him.
Abraham wanted nothing belonging to the King of Sodom.	Jacob wanted nothing from Laban.
Abraham listened to the Lord and followed His instructions.	Jacob listened to the Lord and followed His instructions.
Abraham told Jacob where Isaac got his wife and why.	Jacob got his wife from the same area.
Abraham told Jacob why disobedience brings trouble.	Jacob disobeyed the Lord by stopping at Shechem; trouble followed.
Abraham taught Jacob the value of person-to-person teaching.	Jacob taught Joseph in the tent, who was different to his brothers.
Abraham taught Jacob about waiting for God.	Jacob waited 80 years for his blessing, 20 years for a wife and 22 years to be reunited with Joseph.
Abraham taught how God kept and faithfully provided.	Jacob discovered how the Lord kept him from harm from Haran and Esau and He provided through Joseph.
Abraham taught Jacob how God tested him.	God tested Jacob at the Jabbok River. Jacob was tested when he lost Joseph.

What did Abraham teach Jacob?

- **Obedience to the Call of God:** The New Covenant stresses the need of God doing a new work in a person's life. A change took place in Abraham when he exercised faith in God's promise. A change took place in Jacob

when he wrestled with God. Both examples are an One-on-one dealing with God. Jacob was given a new name. His different names are used according to his behaviour: the old Jacob when he is disobedient or the new Israel when he is obedient to God.

2 Corinthians 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away, the new has arrived.

Abraham told Jacob that he had left his family in obedience to the call of God. Jacob noted that in his mental diary. As Abraham had flocks and herds, he would have moved in the area of the Fertile Crescent where there was water and grazing. Jacob took note of the route that Abraham had followed from Haran.

It was only when Abraham arrived in the area he was promised that God spoke to him again and confirmed that that land would be inhabited by his descendants. The first test of his relationship with God after arriving in the land was a famine. He would have told Jacob that he had not consulted with God.

Leaving home in response to the call of God and going to a country results in a steep learning curve. We were sent to Jordan to learn Arabic and while we lived there, we discovered the way the people lived. So many aspects of life were similar to the Biblical record. To name a few:

- No one runs or acts hastily. Instead you walk sedately in the road. I ran to play with Arab children. I was scolded because I was an old or mature man and when I ran, I humbled myself. Those who put their trust in God will not act hastily. Abraham met three men and realised in his spirit that the Lord was present, so he humbled himself by running and served them. His guests allowed him to do everything he wanted to do.
- When invited for a meal the response should always be to decline with thanks. Only when the host urged or insisted on your coming and having a meal should you respond. The first invitation is just being polite.
- In Arab tents or homes the feet are placed behind as one reclines. Mountains of food are prepared because the name and generosity of the host is at stake. This is shown later by the amount of food left over. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus joined two sad men and they conversed. When they arrived at their destination, Jesus made as if He were walking further. They urged Him to stay with them which He did and reclined while they prepared the meal.

- **God was Everywhere:** Abraham said he moved with his flocks to Egypt. He thought that the God who had called him was restricted to a certain area. He told the Egyptians that Sarai was his sister and she was taken to be part of Pharaoh's family. God intervened and she was restored to Abram. He was taught the lesson that his God was everywhere. What made him go to Egypt? He failed to contact God. He acted foolishly. God is greater than our mistakes and our circumstances. Abraham discovered that the one and only God was present everywhere and not like a local deity. Jacob recorded that mentally.
- **God and our Choices:** Abraham returned to his original destination and parted company with Lot, giving him the choice of the best of the land. Lot chose the area of Sodom and Gomorrah because it was well-watered. It turned out to be a sinful area resulting in it later experiencing the wrath of God, and Lot losing everything.

Jacob knew that Esau did not fear God. So, in this Jacob was like Abraham.

- **Do not take anything from those who do not know God:** Abraham said that after Lot parted, God showed him the full extent of the area that would be his in the future. Later when Lot was captured by Chedorlaomer, Abraham rescued him and brought him and his family and possessions back. He refused to take any of the goods belonging to the King of Sodom lest the king should say he had made Abram rich. Jacob recorded that he should not take anything from those who do not know the only God.

Missionaries prefer to be self-supporting so that they do not become identified with those they work with. Unfortunately, wealth and prosperity are viewed by many as a sign of the blessing of God in the Middle East and surrounding countries. They view status, power and prosperity as signs of God's approval. Missionaries prefer to identify with the locals to urge them to turn to the only Saviour for salvation and a new lifestyle.

- **God will protect you:** Abraham told Jacob that he feared reprisals for his past actions, but the Lord God told him that He would be his shield dealing with his fear and his reward would be very great.
- **Give a tithe to God:** Abraham told Jacob that he had been greeted on his return with Lot by Melchizedek the king of Salem who brought him bread and wine. He gave the king a tenth of the loot which he regarded as

belonging to God. Jacob noted that as important. He too promised God a tenth of all that the Lord gave him.

The tithe is not stipulated in the New Covenant, but God loves a cheerful giver and a willing heart to give whatever He lays on the heart. He is able to cause us to be made willing. All we have, we have received.

- **Faith in the Lord alone:** He told Jacob how the Lord made a covenant with him. He had told the Lord that he was childless. The Lord promised him that he would have a child of his own. Abraham told Jacob that he believed that He would carry out His promise and his faith was reckoned by the Lord as righteousness. Abraham was told that the land he was on would become the land of his descendants. A promise that the Lord would carry out.
- **A Maid could be a Mother:** Abraham told Jacob that as Sarai remained barren, she thought that Hagar should bear a son for Abraham. He admitted once more he did not consult the Lord and slept with Hagar and she bore Ishmael. Jacob stored that in his mind that a maid could also be a mother.
- **Name change:** Abraham said that 13 years later he was again told by the Lord that he would be the father of many nations and that Canaan would belong to his descendants. His name was changed from Abram to Abraham. Jacob knew then that his name could also be changed. It took a long time before his spiritual father's name was changed.
- **Waiting:** Abraham informed Jacob that he had been made to wait for a son until he knew that when they were given a son it was all God's doing. Isaac was born and took the place of Ishmael as the firstborn of Abraham. Jacob recorded in his mind that he could take the place of Esau as the firstborn.

Waiting is never easy because one never knows how long one still has to wait. To act hastily like Sarai who gave Hagar to Abram brought only sorrow and grief to the family. In our case we have had to wait many times. To meet the right person, to get married, to leave for service, to receive full financial support, to buy a house, to return to the field, to keep waiting for the next step.

- **The Promise of a Son and Nation:** Prior to the birth of Isaac, Abraham was told that he and all other males in his camp had to be circumcised to remind them that the covenant would be an everlasting one. A reminder that nothing was too difficult for God. The Lord promised a son through

Sarah. This caused him to laugh. Later he told Jacob that Sarah also laughed and they were instructed that the name of their son would be Isaac meaning “he laughs”. It would remind them that they laughed out of unbelief, but the Lord made it possible for them to laugh when Isaac was born, and others would laugh with them. God had waited a long time for Sarah to have a son. Jacob might have wondered whether the same would happen to him.

- **God Tests Us:** Then Abraham was told to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. He told Jacob that he was about to carry that out when the Lord stopped him and provided a ram caught in a thicket to take the place of Isaac. He had come to know the Lord as one who will provide. Abraham revealed to Jacob that nothing would be allowed to come between himself and the Lord God. Jacob was to know the loss of Joseph just as Abraham lost Ishmael and was tested when told to offer Isaac.

We were tested when God called us to return to the field in Lebanon. This meant leaving our adult children. Our son went to England on an ancestral visa. Our daughter remained to pursue her career as a teacher. In the same year, both our daughter and son joined us in Lebanon. She and her husband were later called to serve there, and our son had met his American wife. We never knew that our return to serve resulted, not in loss but in gain. God never states in advance what He has planned to do with a life. Expect God to do the unexpected.

- **Abraham was Jacob’s Spiritual Father:** Jacob spent much time with his grandfather. **Genesis 28:13 “I am the Lord the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.”**
- **A Meal in exchange for a Birth Right:** Jacob knew from his mother of the promise of the Lord that the older would serve the younger. He knew from Abraham that he could take the place of Esau as the firstborn. He wanted that status because he wanted to be like his spiritual father Abraham, to know his God and to live by his values. Just as Isaac had taken the place of Ishmael, so Jacob could take the place of Esau provided he can open the way for Esau to sell his birth right to Jacob.
- **God will Provide a Wife:** Abraham told Jacob that he did not want Isaac to marry a local woman but rather one from his relatives. He sent one of his servants to bring a woman from the clan he had left. The servant relied on the Lord to show him the right woman to be the wife of Isaac. Jacob noted this as important. He was only about 13 years old at the

time but had discovered that the local women were not for him and that he would have to wait.

All the facts recorded in Jacob's mental diary will unfold in his life.

Jacob stayed in the tent and cooked stew made of lentils, onions and olive oil with salt and rice which is called majedderah and is delicious when served with salad. Every day he cooked stew. Usually the work of women, but it gave him something to do while he waited. He did not look for Esau but waited for Esau to come to him. One day his brother Esau came back to the camp tired and hungry as a result of not killing any game. The smell of lentil stew wrapped itself around Esau's nostrils and captured him, resulting in him valuing food more than his birth right as the firstborn. Jacob wanted Esau's birth right in exchange.

It is the firstborn that maintains the values of the parents. He manages the estate and provides for the parents and listens to what they have to say regarding the way of life acceptable to them. Esau showed that he did not value what his parents wished by marrying local women who distressed Rebekah and made her life miserable. Jacob wanted to be the head of the next generation, to be like his spiritual father and certainly not like Isaac. Isaac had lost sight of his relationship with God. He had prayed for his wife to have children, and Esau and Isaac were born, yet there is no record of the spiritual side of Isaac for many years. A full stomach of venison shared with Esau gave him pleasure.

Esau was called by Isaac to hunt game so that he could give the blessing of the firstborn. Isaac should never have planned that, as it was common knowledge that Esau had sold his position for food. Isaac wanted to bless a son who did not care for God. (Later Jacob made Judah his firstborn because the actions of Reuben, Simeon and Levi had disqualified them.) Rebekah heard Isaac speak to Esau and was determined that Jacob should receive the blessing, so she told Jacob to get a goat so that she could prepare a tasty dish that she knew Isaac liked. Jacob was afraid of being cursed by his father and protested that he was not hairy like Esau, but Rebekah told him to follow her instructions to get the blessing. Note that Jacob did not plan or protest to Isaac but obeyed his mother. He did not try to imitate Esau in his speech.

Isaac was deceived and Jacob received his blessing which included the activity of the Lord in blessing. None of which would fit in with Esau's lifestyle. When Isaac realised the deception, he confirmed that Jacob would

be blessed. Did he recognise that he was previously at fault in wanting to bless Esau? Esau got a blessing from Isaac but one of living by the sword.

Genesis 27:41-42 Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.” 42 When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is planning to avenge himself by killing you.”

Esau thought in his heart that he would kill Jacob after the death of Isaac. Who told Rebekah what Esau thought in his heart? The Lord. She told Jacob to leave home and go to her family in Haran and stay there to escape the anger of Esau. She told Isaac that Jacob must not marry local women and he agreed and confirmed the first blessing with another: **Genesis 28:3** **And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people.**

She told Jacob not to marry the heathen women in the area but to return and marry one of his relatives. Today people still marry within the larger family. Cousins marry so that the possessions stay within the family and are not lost to strangers or other families. Whole sections of a village belong to a clan.

Esau noted that Isaac told Jacob not to marry a local woman but to go to his relatives in Padan Aram. He saw also that Jacob obeyed his father, so Esau tried to restore himself by marrying a daughter of Ishmael. He did not submit himself to the counsel of his father. He imitated Jacob without realizing he needed a relationship with the Lord.

Jacob, about 80 years old, left his home at Beersheba on the instructions of his parents. After a day of walking, he slept and had a dream. God spoke to him for the first recorded time. It was a One-on-one meeting.

Genesis 28:13-15 **And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, “I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; 14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”**

Jacob continued on his way to Paddan Aram. He eventually arrived near Haran. He arrived at a well, covered with a large stone in the open country. He met shepherds and asked them about the area. They said they were from Haran and that Rachel the daughter of Laban was approaching with her flock of sheep. He wanted them to water their sheep so that he could deal with Rachel alone.

Jacob showed that he was physically a strong man as he moved the stone from the well on his own and watered her flock. Only then did he tell Rachel that he was the son of Rebekah before he kissed Rachel and wept. Why? After such a long walk to come across family in a strange land, he must have wept out of gratitude. I wept when I disclosed my love for my future wife, and she shared how God had been working in her life. If we wait, God will bring the person of His choice to be our spouse. I waited and am thankful I left it to God. He always gives His best.

Laban hurried out to meet Jacob after Rachel had told him and kissed and embraced Jacob before receiving him into their home. After a month, Jacob and Laban agreed that Jacob could serve Laban seven years for the hand of Rachel.

Because he loved Rachel, those years seemed like a few days. Time flies for all of mankind. Our time on earth is soon past.

Laban deceived him. On his wedding night, Jacob was tricked and in the space of two weeks, he received two brides and two maids for another seven years of labour. This was not his organizing. During that time, they bore him many sons and a daughter.

After working a total of 14 years, Jacob wanted to leave with his family, but Laban had discovered that God had blessed him because Jacob was in his home, so he wanted more. They agreed on Jacob's future wages. Jacob said he wanted nothing from Laban just as Abraham wanted nothing from the king of Sodom. Jacob said that his wages in the future would be sheep that were dark, and goats spotted. Laban agreed and removed them from the flock.

Jacob tried at first to manipulate the breeding of the sheep and goats but Laban over the next 6 years changed his wages eight times. He had already changed his wages twice. Whatever changes Laban made, the Lord caused Jacob to prosper. The Lord was greater than his circumstances.

Few praise Jacob for his response to Laban. Those who have made up their minds about Jacob being an unsavoury person avoid verses that show him

in a good light. We need to take into account *all* Scripture. God blessed Jacob in many ways. Never found fault with him and when he went astray, He prompted him to carry out what he was told.

Actually, God allowed Laban to make life difficult for Jacob so that the latter would not try to rely on himself but rather on the Lord. Jesus taught that those who follow Him would encounter persecution and trouble from their society. It would cause them to rely on God alone and not put their trust in man.

After 20 years with Laban, God told Jacob to return to Bethel. For 20 years no communication from God? He was in the right place so there was no need for any directive from God. People wonder why God does not speak to them clearly. He has given His Word; His final revelation and they need to read it and trust that His presence in their lives will cause them to do His will. His peace or absence thereof should be a sign if they are doing that which pleases Him. However, whenever a great change takes place and there is uprooting and moving elsewhere, the Lord speaks and convicts with greater certainty.

There are now five aspects of guidance. These usually happen to all of us but not in the same order.

Circumstances Change: **Genesis 31:1** And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory."

Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were envious of his prosperity and that Laban no longer looked with favour upon him. Then Laban heard the Lord telling Jacob to return to his family and that He would be with him. Even though they lived in different areas, it became evident that Jacob and his family prospered but Laban and his sons were not as blessed and that resulted in envy as they saw the contrast. God is greater than our circumstances. We need to live in obedience to Him and carry out all He tells us to do. You will discover that you and the Lord are in total agreement in what you think, say and do.

The Word of God is Revealed: **Genesis 31:3** And the Lord said unto Jacob, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee."

The Word of God directed him. Not an easy step when nobody in the family has done that before. God will make that possible. God called me to leave our society for an unknown distant land. He did not tell me what

lay ahead. Many people tried to point out the foolishness of what God required me to do, but God overcame every obstacle.

The Family of God Agree: Genesis 31:4 And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock.

Jacob consulted Leah and Rachel. His family was involved. They supported his leaving. Today we would need the support of the local assembly recognising the call of God. The view of the local church is important so that we do not act on our own. Sometimes the local church lacks the vision and do not get involved. Then the servant of the Lord must depend only on the Lord.

When called to return to the land where we had taught and received our children, our local church stated that they could not support our going. We pressed on and God raised the means for our return to the land of Lebanon. As we were preparing to depart, our local church finally agreed to be part of our team. They at first saw the problems. We trusted God and suddenly they no longer saw the obstacles. It could be that they thought they would have to bear the total cost and when they found they could be a part of the total; they had a change of heart. Like David, we should not see Goliath but God.

God's Intervention: Genesis 31:24 And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, "Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad."

God has a way of confirming the action we must take. As we started to raise our support to return to the Lebanon we came to an area where those that promised to arrange meetings failed to do so. God intervened in our case in other ways showing that what He wanted us to do was His will.

God's Timing: Genesis 32:1-2 And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 And when Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim."

The fifth aspect would be the four coming about at the same time. Confirming to Jacob that his leaving Laban was a step in the right direction. That it had the blessing of the Lord.

After Jacob dealt with Laban, Esau approached him with four hundred men. Esau had forgotten the past but not Jacob. He forgot what God had just done by protecting him from Laban. He tried to placate Esau and protect his family by offering Esau material prosperity. Did Jacob give the tithe he should have given to God, to Esau?

God had to deal with Jacob personally to stop him relying on his efforts to placate Esau. At the Jabbok River, He wrestled with Jacob. Just the two of them. Very personal. Jacob showed once more he was physically strong, and God had to weaken him physically, causing him to limp thereafter. He would not let go until God blessed him.

God asked him what his name was as though He did not know! He said his name was Jacob and God told him that it would no longer be that because he had struggled with God and man and come out victorious. His name would be *Israel*. His name was changed from Jacob to Israel, but the transformation of his character would take time and he was still acting as Jacob. Physical strength can hide spiritual weakness. When we are weakened by a virus, we soon discover our limitations and need of trusting the Lord. Paul the apostle said, “When I am weak then I am strong. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Whenever there is a name change it indicates what is in the ascendancy. Jacob, his old nature, Israel his new.

Jacob refused to live in the vicinity of Esau. He eventually arrived at Shechem and stopped short of his destination which was at Mamre. He brought trouble on his family. His daughter, Dinah, was raped by Shechem son of Hamor, and his sons, Simeon and Levi, exacted revenge to restore the honour of the family by killing the inhabitants of Shechem. Honour killings still take place in Bible lands. Jacob was afraid of the consequences and blamed his sons whereas he was himself out of the will of God. Did Jacob pray? No. He was told by God to go to Bethel and build an altar where he had first met the Lord.

Jacob recognised that God was turning him away from the fear of man and that he and his family should worship God with an undivided heart. Jacob knew that he could not worship God unless all the idols and superstitions the family believed in were removed. He told his family to remove all the foreign gods, amulets, old beliefs. These he buried. Today people are still very superstitious. A hand with a blue eye on the front door is displayed for protection from the evil eye. When admiring a child, “Smallah” (the name of God) must be said to prevent the devil from attacking it.

Once the break with the past had been made, God acted, and the fear of God descended, and Jacob and his family proceeded unharmed. This is the way God works today. When His people rely on Him only, He acts for the honour of His Name. The church must put her house in order before the Lord acts to bless her.

Jacob returned home to Mamre in time to bury Isaac. When he arrived back in Bethel as he was told to do, his new name was confirmed. The promises made to Abraham were confirmed and made to him. Jacob was back in the land where his father had lived.

He was in his mid-70s when he left for Haran. He later met Pharaoh at the age of 130. He lost Joseph 22 years before that. He stayed with Laban for 20 years. He took a few years to go from place to place. He arrived in time for the death of Isaac aged 180. At the time Jacob was 120 years old.

Joseph was born while Jacob was completing the 14 years for his wives for his work as a shepherd, so he must have been 6 years old when Jacob left Padan Aram. He was 17 when he had the two dreams. So between leaving Laban and returning to Canaan must have taken 11 years.

What does all this calculation prove? That Jacob was prepared to wait for his wife and eventually he landed up with four mothers of his children. Joseph was the son of Jacob's old age and the son of Rachel, the only one he wanted to marry. Joseph spent more time with Jacob because he was the youngest and the others took care of the flocks while he stayed at home. His brothers envied his relationship with their father. Joseph's character and behaviour was so different to that of his brothers.

Today God still gives instructions to His people and then expects them to get on with the task until the next step is revealed. Joseph was in the tent with his father who showed him favour by making him a special robe. Just as Jacob had spent time alone with Abraham so now Joseph was with Jacob alone. The other brothers were with the flock. Joseph was told by Jacob the life of Abraham and his own life.

What did Jacob pass on to Joseph at approximately the same age when Abraham told him about the Lord's dealing with him?

Jacob would have told Joseph that the Lord used his time with Abraham to learn about the only God. He taught him how God had revealed His will through a dream at Bethel stating that He would always be present with him as He is the only God who is not restricted to a locality.

Joseph, by learning from Jacob about Abraham, would have recorded all the details that are found in the book of Genesis concerning the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

I have often wondered if this is the type of conversation that took place:

Joseph: My father, why did you have a relationship with the only God?

Jacob: It really started when my grandfather Abraham shared his experience with me in the camp at Mamre. He took the place of my father Isaac who loved Esau. It was as a result of discovering the involvement of the Almighty God in the life of Abraham that I wanted the position of firstborn so that my family could carry on the beliefs, values and way of life of Abraham.

Joseph: But you were not the firstborn so how did you become that?

Jacob: I knew that if Isaac could take the place of Ishmael, I could take the place of Esau. One day my brother Esau came back hungry and sold me his position as firstborn for a plate of lentil stew.

Joseph: Did that make any difference in the home?

Jacob: Very little except that Esau made life miserable for my mother by not consulting our parents to get him a wife and marrying Canaanite women.

Joseph: How did you get the blessing of Isaac?

Jacob: I followed the instructions of my mother even though I was scared that Isaac would find out and curse me instead of blessing me.

Joseph: What was Esau's reaction when you took his blessing?

Jacob: God told my mother that Esau planned in his heart to kill me after the death of Isaac. Only God knows the thoughts of a man.

Joseph: So what happened next?

Jacob: My mother Rebekah told Isaac that I was not to marry a local girl but a member of her family. He agreed and they sent me to Haran to the family of Laban, her brother, with a further blessing.

Joseph: Did you talk to God at all?

Jacob: The Lord appeared to me after I was a day's journey from home and had arrived at Bethel. He said He was the Lord the God of Abraham. He spoke to me in a dream and promised His presence with me and would bring me back home.

Joseph: What did you say to God?

Jacob: I said that the Lord would be my God and promised to give Him a tithe of all He gave me.

Joseph: Where did you get that idea?

Jacob: From Abraham giving a tenth to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, from the loot after the victory over Chedorlaomer.

Joseph: Did you have to search for a wife?

Jacob: No. The first woman who arrived when I reached Haran was Rachel, your mother, coming with her flock. I watered her flock and kissed her and said I was her relative, the son of Rebekah.

Joseph: How did Laban receive you?

Jacob: With a warm welcome at first and then asked what I would pay for Rachel. I said I would work 7 years by looking after his flocks. He agreed.

Joseph: How then did you marry and have four wives, the mothers of my brothers and sister?

Jacob: Laban deceived me. I only discovered on my wedding night that he had given me Leah. So I had to work another seven years but in the company of Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah.

Joseph: Where did you get all these sheep and goats if after 14 years all you had was family?

Jacob: I told Laban that I wanted nothing from him like Abraham who wanted nothing from the king of Sodom. The speckled and spotted sheep and goats would be my wages. Laban agreed.

Joseph: How long did you serve Laban?

Jacob: A total of 20 years but only 6 years for my own sheep and goats. At first, I tried to organize my wages but after Laban kept changing them, I gave up and left it to God who prospered me.

Joseph: Why did you leave Laban and return to this area?

Jacob: For five main reasons:

- My Circumstances Changed: The family of Laban envied me because of the way God had blessed me and they saw me as opposition. The fact was that God was with me and not with Laban because of the way he was treating me.
- The Word of God was Revealed to Me: God told me to leave and return home. He promised His presence and blessing.
- My Family Agreed: I shared this with Leah and Rachel, and they recognized that the two families had nothing in common. We left without warning. Laban who found out three days later, pursued us.

- God Intervened for Me: The day before Laban arrived God warned him not to try to make me turn back by empty promises or threats.
- God's Timing was Perfect: All of these circumstances came about at the same time, confirming to me that I had done God's will.

Joseph: Did you make contact with your brother Esau?

Jacob: Yes. I heard that he was coming with four hundred men and I thought that he was coming to repay me for the loss of the birth right and the blessing. So, I prepared a large gift to placate him. I prayed to God, but I acted as though it depended on me rather than Him. When I was on my own, a Man whom I knew to be more than a man wrestled with me, but I put up a good fight until He weakened me. I refused to let Him go until He blessed me. He gave me a new name: Israel. When I acted trusting in God, my new name Israel was used. When I lost sight of God, my old name of Jacob took control.

Joseph: What happened at Shechem?

Jacob: I acted foolishly by setting up camp at Shechem instead of going on to Bethel where God first spoke to me. The son of Shechem slept with your sister and wanted to marry her but Simeon and Levi plotted to take revenge for bringing shame to our family and eventually wiped out all the males and took the rest and their property as loot. I was afraid that the people of the area would destroy us, but God did not reproach me for staying at Shechem, instead He told me to erect an altar at Bethel. I knew that the Lord was the only God and that all other beliefs and idols were useless, so I told our family to give me all their idols and charms which I buried, and we made a fresh, clean start as a family.

Joseph: What happened to my mother?

Jacob: I lost Rachel when she gave birth to Benjamin and we buried her before I reached Mamre, where Esau and I buried our father Isaac.

Joseph: What do you think of my dreams?

Jacob: I do not know what they could mean but you are different to your brothers and maybe God has a role for you to play in the future.

Joseph: Why are you so different to the people around us?

Jacob: I spent a number of years learning about the relationship Abraham had with the Lord and wanted to imitate him.

Joseph: What did he tell you?

Jacob: That his descendants would be as the stars. He believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. He was prepared to obey the only God even when I could not understand what He wanted.

Joseph: Such as?

Jacob: Leaving his family and going to an unknown area. Trusting the promises of God without any sign of it being carried out. In each case, his faith in the only God was strengthened. God blessed him and showed him that nothing was too hard for Him. Later Abraham was told to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. He was about to carry it out when God intervened and provided a substitute in the form of a ram.

Joseph: Did you imitate your grandfather Abraham?

Jacob: Yes, I wanted nothing from Laban, and I promised God a tenth of all He gave me. Like Abraham, I have had to wait for my blessings: my wife, my children and my possessions.

Joseph: So what have you learned in your relationship with the Lord?

Jacob: That God is greater than my circumstances by providing for me in the hostile family of Laban.

He is greater than my limitations by providing for me when my wages were changed ten times.

He is greater than my stubbornness when He wrestled with me at the Jabbok River and gave me a new name which is Israel.

Joseph's time with Jacob, his father, resulted in him being different to his brothers. It was natural for Jacob to favour Joseph as he was the son of his old age and the son of the woman he wanted to marry.

All his life he lived conscious of the Lord. He harboured no anger or thought of revenge for all they had done to him. He accepted the ordering of his life including his being sold into slavery as, though his brothers intended it for evil, God intended it for good.

God is at work in all the lives of those He has elected. What seems as chance happenings, coincidences, He uses to order our lives. The day God called me to leave my country and serve Him in Lebanon, He made it possible for

me to attend a meeting 40 kilometres away. God made my studying at university possible by causing my father to be promoted three times in my final year at Bible college.

Jacob told Joseph how he had to wait for a wife, he had to wait before he could build up his estate. He was told when to leave. This also happened to Joseph who was prepared to wait for God to give him a wife. In the meantime, he did not give in to temptation and sleep with women.

Isaiah 64:4 He acts on behalf of those who wait for Him.

At the age of 17, Joseph had a dream which was understood by all his brothers that they would one day all bow before him. Such a dream would provoke them. Was that in fact the intention of God? The second dream which revealed that in the future, his parents and brothers would bow before him. Jacob rebuked Joseph who was only passing on what God had revealed to him.

Before Esau, there was Laban. Before Jacob lost Joseph, he was told the dreams of Joseph. The Lord was preparing Jacob for the loss of Joseph to provide for Jacob and his family. The Lord appeared in a specific way and each time dramatic changes took place.

Genesis 37:11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Jacob noted these dreams in his mental diary. Just as he had noted all that his spiritual father Abraham had taught him.

Israel (Jacob still rejoicing) told Joseph to go to his brothers looking after the sheep so that he could inform Jacob as to their behaviour. He was obedient. His brothers planned to kill the dreamer, but Reuben delivered Joseph from death and on arrival Joseph was thrown into a pit by his brothers.

Judah had an idea of selling him to Midianite traders who were passing by on their way to Egypt and the others agreed. Judah pointed out that Joseph was family. Joseph was sold despite his pleading which was revealed later.

They hated the sight of him. They hardened their hearts. Yet in all their actions, God was working out His purposes. They intended it for evil, but God intended it for good. God is still today using experiences and methods to complete the work He has begun in us. For some a thorn in the flesh, for others a spiritual thorn. It keeps us humble, usable and teachable.

The brothers covered up their deed by lying to their father who lost sight of the dreams of Joseph and imagined the worst. Their father was no longer Israel but Jacob. He mourned for a long time and wept much.

The Lord was with Joseph while he served Potiphar. The wife of Potiphar viewed Joseph as a substitute for her often-absent husband. Joseph refused her approach to sleep with him as he would be sinning against God. The act might be done in secret, but Joseph was aware that his every act was done in the presence of the Lord. He was different because of his time with a father who was different. When her attempts to entice him were rejected she accused him of adultery and her husband had him confined in the local prison.

Joseph suffered for being righteous. The Lord did not leave him but caused him to find favour with the head of the prison and he was placed in charge of the running of the prison. Because the Lord was with him, everything went well in the place and the warden trusted him to manage the running of the facility.

Once more everything he did prospered because Joseph lived in obedience to God. Joseph was a good advertisement of the relationship he had had with Jacob. No one is born with a desire to please God. Hours were spent talking and listening to Jacob who would have shared much from his time with Abraham. This would explain why Joseph was so different to his brothers.

That period spent as a slave of Potiphar and then in the prison was not wasted. Joseph pleased God in adversity. God is always at work preparing His people for His appointed task in the future. Joseph did not waste time complaining about injustice or the rejection of his brothers. God takes His time.

While in charge of the prison, others had dreams which Joseph was able to explain and turned out as he predicted. Joseph had to wait another two years before Pharaoh had dreams that no-one could explain to him. His cupbearer told him how in the past, Joseph had explained the meaning of his dream and it proved to turn out as predicted. Pharaoh sent for Joseph aged 30. Joseph did not take any credit for his ability. He showed humility and wisdom. He explained the dreams and told Pharaoh what to do regarding the implementation of the steps over the next fourteen years. Pharaoh appointed him as his deputy with his authority when he gave him his seal ring and placed him in charge of the country. Obviously, there was no one more suitable for the position. One who could empathize with the

down-trodden yet walk with nobility. All because the Lord was with him and whatever he did, prospered. His elevation in society happened very quickly. God promises to act quickly in its time.

Pharaoh recognized that the Spirit of God was in Joseph to give him discernment. **Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do His commandments: His praise endureth for ever.**

Seven years of abundant harvest resulted in Joseph storing vast amounts of grain and that was followed as predicted by seven years of famine.

Jacob knew nothing of the experiences of Joseph which was a mercy. He had Benjamin to keep him company but would not forget Joseph. He must have wondered why God had allowed the loss of Joseph. Yet all the time, God was in control working out His purposes. He was providing in advance for the needs of Jacob and his family in the future.

More than 20 years had passed since the loss of Joseph and news reached Jacob that there was grain in Egypt. It appears he blamed his other sons for the loss of Joseph because he would not trust them to look after Benjamin, so he sent his ten sons. They returned with the grain as well as the money they took to buy it but had to leave Simeon behind. What disturbed Jacob was that the sons were instructed by the Governor of Egypt not to return unless Benjamin was with them. In his heart, Jacob had now also lost Simeon, so he said everything was against him. We know the overall plan, but he did not. So, the waiting continued until Benjamin accompanied them.

Jacob placed his cup in Benjamin's bag and told the brothers that Benjamin would remain with him. Judah asked if he could take the place of Benjamin so as not to cause their father to grieve and possibly die of sorrow. Joseph did not reveal himself to his brothers until he discovered that they regretted the way they had got rid of him and had changed in their behaviour.

Joseph who had wept in private when he first saw his brothers, wept again when he revealed to them that he was Joseph. He told them to bring their father Jacob and sent carts for the family in Canaan to go to Egypt and settle there. He later told them that their action in getting rid of him was meant for evil, but God had planned that their action would result in the salvation of the entire family as five more years of famine were still to take place.

In the future a similar event would take place. The rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah Jesus would turn out to be God's way of salvation for all those who accepted that what He had done applied to them. Jacob did not at first believe his sons, but when he saw the carts, his new name of Israel was used.

The brothers returned to Canaan and told their father that Joseph was alive and was now the Governor of Egypt, but Jacob did not believe them. It was too good to be true but when he saw the carts, his spirit revived and his name changed to Israel.

Genesis 45:27-28 And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: 28 And Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die."

His new name kicked in and he spoke with faith.

Joseph being alive and in a position of authority after such a long time was too good to be true. All those years of mourning and weeping were wasted. The dreams that Joseph had prior to his departure should have strengthened the faith of Jacob.

We too must learn to live by faith and trust God in advance that He is able to accomplish what He has planned before the creation of the world.

As he came with his family to Beersheba, he worshipped the Lord who then appeared to him. He called him Jacob and said, "I am the God of your father." Abraham was the only father he knew. I am sure he would have thought of Abraham. We always remember those who have played an important role in our lives. God told him not to be afraid to go to Egypt, He would go with him and make him a great nation. It had been over 22 years since God had spoken to Jacob.

As the family approached Egypt, Jacob sent Judah to ascertain their location in the land. Judah had taken over the role of firstborn which would be confirmed when Jacob bestowed his final blessing. When Jacob met Joseph, his new name of Israel is used. Joseph wept when he saw his father.

Weeping is a sign of a sensitive heart and love in spite of poor treatment by the brothers and 20 years of not enjoying the company of his father Jacob. His brothers found it difficult to believe that Joseph had really forgiven them. Joseph had to reassure them that they were forgiven.

Joseph brought Jacob to Pharaoh and he blessed him. He was 130 years old. He lived another 17 years and made his son Joseph promise to bury him with Isaac and Abraham.

Eventually Jacob discovered how God had planned to provide for him and his family. He had to wait for 22 years. He mourned the loss of his son while God was at the time planning for his family. God waits for His appointed time when all the pieces fit together.

The life of Joseph so different to those of his brothers is proof of the relationship he had with his father Jacob which resulted in his actions revealing the evidence of him being a new creation of the Spirit of God.

What did Joseph learn from Jacob and ultimately Abraham, through his father? To trust God alone. Not to rely on man. All three men were kept and prospered through faith in the living God. They were given promises which God carried out in their lives.

Isaiah 64:4 For since the beginning of the world Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, Nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.

God acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. God Himself had to wait for the right time to enter our world. So often He keeps us waiting so that we do not take any of the credit that is due to Him alone.

The time came for Jacob to bless his sons prior to his death. When Joseph arrived, the new name of Israel was used. He recounted his life from the time that God Almighty first appeared to him.

After Jacob died only Joseph wept. Like father like son. He buried his father in Canaan as promised.

Joseph wept again when his brothers tried to placate him. They could not accept they had been forgiven for their actions. Like the stone the builders rejected became the chief cornerstone.



READ

Genesis 50:15-21 Joseph Reassures His Brothers

Joseph's brothers had not forgotten what they had done. 17 years after selling Joseph into slavery, they still experienced guilt and shame and fear.

All of us are aware of things we have thought, said and done. The evil one causes us to remember so that we are filled with regret and sorrow which leads to depression.

What things? Our anger, impatience, resentment, unwillingness to forgive and forget. Acting on our own and failing to consult with our Saviour, the Lord Jesus. Our selfishness and self-centredness, thoughtlessness, our love of money, our fears. That which we have done known only to ourselves and God.

Time we have wasted with little to show. Idolatry in the form of spending time pursuing what we wanted to do. We lost sight of Jesus and allowed other things to take up our time and energy. That which is transient. So little time spent just with Jesus, so little time discovering His will and doing it.

What Joseph said to his brothers he also says to us. God is greater than our circumstances and was able to accomplish His purposes in our lives even though at the time we left Him out of our calculations.

Think of the rejection of Jesus, followed by His crucifixion and death. That very act by sinful men resulted in our salvation provided we participated in what Jesus allowed evil men to do to Him.

Above is a short list of our failures and sins. The shed blood of Jesus covers all of those failures. We overcome the accusations of the devil by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony that we shelter under that blood. We are totally forgiven. We have nothing to fear, our past actions and failures have been forgiven and removed. When they come into our minds confess them to the Lord and thank Him that His blood has dealt with that.

Events beyond our control happen in our lives. Joseph's brothers did not know at the time that their evil act of getting rid of Joseph would result in the salvation of the family from famine. Likewise, none of us know the mind and ways of God. He says in His word that as high as the heavens are above the earth so are His ways and thoughts higher than ours.

So, what should our response be? Paul in prison wrote to the Philippian church, Rejoice and again I say rejoice. Instead of complaining about our aging bodies that are wearing out, we should rejoice that we have life and our desire is to depart and be with Jesus. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Rejoice that all your sins are forgiven, and that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for you that where He is you might be also. Do not look back over your life with regret but seek to use what time you have to allow God to have His way in you in helping others.

Consider the life of Jacob:

- Abraham was his spiritual father; a role that Isaac should have played. A fact recognised by God.
- Jacob wanted God's best by following in the footsteps of Abraham.
- God never found fault with Jacob. He said "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated".
- All the major decisions in the life of Jacob were made by God.
- Esau came to him to sell the birth right.
- Rebekah told him what to say to get the blessing.
- Rebekah supported by Isaac told him who to marry.
- Jacob did not seek God. God appeared to him at Bethel.
- Rachel came to him on arrival in Haran.
- He was asked by Laban about his wages. He did not want Laban to give him anything.
- He received the mothers of his children in two weeks.
- His wages were changed ten times, but God prospered him.
- He was told by God when to return home.
- God dealt very directly with him at the Jabbok River and gave him a new name: Israel.
- His fear of reprisals was dealt with by God who turned his attention to worship.
- He knew what to do about idols after God had spoken to him about worship.
- The needs of his family were dealt with through the loss of Joseph.
- Jacob spent long periods of time waiting for the next step.
- He seldom complained. When he did God was actually preparing a solution.

Psalm 46:7 The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 46:10 Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations.

The God of Jacob is our refuge. We need to be still and know that his God is our God.

Jacob was a quiet and complete man who allowed God to order his life.

We need to do the same.

THREE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LIFE OF JACOB

- Why did God allow Laban to defraud and deceive Jacob?
- Why did God wrestle with Jacob?
- Why did God allow Jacob to make a big mistake that affected his family?

Apply these questions to our own lives:

- Why does God allow people to deceive and defraud us today?
- Why does God deal differently and personally with every one of us?
- Why does God allow us to make big and little mistakes?

Why did God allow Laban to defraud and deceive Jacob?

Jacob was doing the will of God in going to the family of his mother to find a wife.

Laban intended his deceit for evil by taking advantage of Jacob, but God intended it for good because it resulted in many sons for Jacob.

Then Jacob worked another 6 years for his wages. They were specified at the start. However, in the space of those 6 years they were changed 10 times. God allowed Laban to *deceive* and *defraud* Jacob.

Why? Jacob himself discovered the answer but only at the end of the period.

Genesis 31:42 Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac had been with me I would have come away with nothing. God has seen my affliction and the labour of my hands.

We are in a hostile world. Everyone is looking after his own interests and seeks his own advantage. We will be defrauded and taken advantage of by those around us. However, like Jacob, it makes us more dependent than ever on God. We will also discover, like Jacob, that God has been with us and is involved in our affairs although at the time there may be little evidence of that.

Jacob was naïve. He was hard working and honest. Laban could not fault him in any way. Yet took advantage of him.

We all tend to live according to common sense and expect people to be honest and fair in their dealings with us.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.

God has promised: I will direct and teach you the way that you shall go. I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Be not like the horse or mule that needs to be curbed by bit and bridle. God usually does not get involved unless we turn to Him. Why? Because He has given man the freedom to choose. Either to go it alone or to ask for the involvement of God.

Today many people are being conned by evil men who promise great returns but are really seeking to take away their life savings. Beware people. Seek the counsel of God and His servants. Do not act hastily. Submit all your decisions and actions to God even if it seems to contradict common sense. The Lord wants to be involved but will wait for our invitation.

God is greater than our *circumstances*. Man might intend it for evil, but God intends it for good.

Why did a Man wrestle with Jacob?

Who was that man? The Pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ.

God had said to Jacob “I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel where you anointed the pillar and made a vow to Me. Get out of this land and return to the land of your family.”

Genesis 31:3 Then the Lord said to Jacob, “Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”

Genesis 32:9 Jacob prayed “O God of my father Abraham (spiritual) and God of my father Isaac (biological), the Lord who said to me ‘Return to your country to your family and I will deal well with you.’ ”

Genesis 32:11-12 Deliver me from my brother Esau for I fear him. 12 For You have said “I will surely treat you well and make your descendants as the sands of the seashore.”

Then what did Jacob do? Did he trust God and leave it to Him? No. Like so many of us, he resorted to his own devices to placate his brother.

Do we not do the same? We ask God for His counsel and help and then proceed to solve our own problem as though we are responsible instead of relying on God. God has various methods in dealing with His children. He uses the method of *waiting* until they stop their organizing and rely only on Him.

God waits until He alone gets the credit for His intervention and teaches His servant to not help Him out.

Another method is by direct *personal intervention*. God came in the form of a Man and wrestled with Jacob. Jacob realised afterwards this was no

ordinary man. What does God have to do in your life to gain the victory? Take away that which you rely on apart from Him? Your reliance on your natural gifts of intellect, physical strength, appearance, oratory, beautiful voice, artistic talents.

A Preacher in the USA lost his voice. His ministry came to an end and he had to get other work. 3 years later, he spoke in a whisper to his old church. Miraculously, his voice returned, and his ministry resumed. Pride of ability and self-reliance has to be dealt a mortal blow so that God alone is exalted.

Jacob considered the blessing of God more important than the blessing of Isaac, resulting in the growth of his family and his prosperity. It was a *spiritual* blessing. A specific blessing for him alone.

When God has dealt personally with us, either by waiting or personal intervention or some other means known only to God such as a thorn in the flesh with Paul or a thorn in the spirit or withdrawal of insight and liberty of speech, the result is a greater and more effective ministry but resulting not in pride of achievement by man but glory to God.

God's purpose will not be thwarted. What will it take for God to make you more effective in His service? It will be a blessing never to be forgotten resulting in a changed person with a different outlook and purpose in life God wants to use the softer, gentler approach. Your gentleness has made me great. Failing that will require discipline which though grievous at the time will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. It is a One-on-one matter. God will deal with you as if you are the only person in the hall, city or country. He wants to use you effectively, even in old age.

GOD is greater than our *old nature* and our *stubbornness*.

Why did God allow Jacob to make a big mistake that affected his family?

Why does God not stop us making big mistakes in our lives? God gives us freedom of choice. He allows us to be the boss, the one who is all wise, knows everything, and thinks that the right course of action is obvious with no pitfalls. He allows man to presume what the future is going to unfold, the economic state of the world, the climate which will stay the same, the life expectancy of the "boss" are all factors which only God knows and orders to accomplish His purposes.

When we have made a mistake by leaving God out of our decision, we should humble ourselves, acknowledge our failure, submit ourselves to God and seek His help and advice in rectifying the situation. It might mean relocation, removal of all other props that are worthless and make a fresh

start of being obedient to all that God requires of us. Failure is an event not a person.

Having made mistakes would be a reminder that we can make them again if we act on our own and not consult God and expect Him to guide us with His counsel. Once more we must be prepared to give God time to unfold His will and purpose. Those that wait for the Lord will not act hastily.

God is greater than our *mistakes*.

When God works personally in our lives, we will know what to do that will fit in with His purposes and cease to plan and act without the help of God.

Conclusions:

It is good to conclude with the change of question: Don't ask "Why did You allow others to defraud me?", or "Why did You have to personally intervene?" or "Why did You allow me to make a mistake?" But rather to ask: "What Lord do You want to teach me through these experiences in my relationship with You?" Very personal, private, known only to the individual and their Saviour and Lord.

- God is greater than *those opposed to us* and who would take advantage of us. He was able to prosper Jacob in adverse circumstances and He is able to do the same for us.
- God was greater than the *old nature* of Jacob. He could have caused Jacob to find favour with Esau apart from Jacob's organizing, so God had to weaken Jacob to make him even more dependent on God.
- God was greater than Jacob's *mistakes*. He never rebuked him for his failure but reminded him to return to Bethel where he first met God. In all things God works for good to those who love Him.

This does not give us the liberty to do as we like but counting on the ability of God to rectify the situation. Instead we should share every situation, every offer, every agreement, every course of action with God.

God does not want us to suffer loss and cause harm to ourselves and our families and others. His aim is to prosper us and do us good so involve Him in every act and decision.

- There is forgiveness with God.
- There is a way back to God from the darkness of sin.
- There is a way that is open when you come as a sinner to Jesus.

TWO KINDS OF SEED

Deuteronomy 22:9-12

Reading the following instructions about farming and clothes, one may ask what this has to do with me? I am no farmer.



READ

Deuteronomy 22:9-12 Various Laws of Morality

A casual reading of these verses would suggest that it applied just to farming and not to us. “I am not a farmer. This does not apply to me.” But it does. The New Testament explains the Old and the aspects of the Torah that seem to be irrelevant today. A key to the truth of the Old Testament is found in

1 Corinthians 9:9-11 For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” Is it oxen God is concerned about? **10** Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. **11** If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?

v9 There are two kinds of seed in this world. Spiritual seed (as seen in **1 Corinthians 9:11**) and ordinary seed which is unnecessary talk, stories, jokes, gossip, small talk which just wastes time and we are warned that on the Day of Judgement we will have to give an account for every idle word. Spiritual seed is aimed at building up those that are the body of Christ and produces life. The origin of it is God and He blesses His Word that is passed on. In **Malachi 3**, the people that revered and loved God talked amongst themselves about the Lord. This gave Him pleasure and He made a record of each of them because they were different to the majority and did not waste words.

If we sow both spiritual and ordinary words, we will lose the seed sown, the harvest from that seed and the fruit of the vineyard or the fruit of our life. I must yield my tongue to the Lord.

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

Aim at pointing people to Jesus and building up their faith. When you go on visits what do you talk about? Are you like the people in Malachi’s day who brought pleasure to the Lord? If you waste words during the day and an opportunity to help someone in need arises, you

will find you have no power, no liberty and you will not be able to understand why you feel tongue-tied and mute.

Jeremiah 15:19 Therefore thus says the Lord: “If you return, Then I will bring you back; You shall stand before Me; If you take out the precious from the vile, You shall be as My mouth. Let them return to you, But you must not return to them.”

You will not be ashamed if you pass on the Word of God only.

v10 This is still done because the poor cannot afford two oxen and so use their transport as well.

Is God concerned about oxen? Is He not writing this for us? Yes, He is writing this for us. Therefore, we must not use our mouths to sow ordinary seed in gossip, idle talk or nonsense and at the same time try to share the truth of God with others. If we do that, then the results of the good seed sown will be lost to the servant of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

The Lord forbids people from starting relationships that will result in a child that does not love the Lord, marrying someone belonging to a foreign god. Compromise results in loss and a divided home. God has a designated partner for His children but if there are some that remain single, He has promised that the children of the barren women will be more than that of the married women. Disobedience results in misery and loss of blessing.

v11 Is God concerned about clothing? Is God not writing this for us? Yes, He is. Wool is warm and causes sweat and has to do with hard work and self-effort. Linen keeps one cool and there is no sweat but enjoyment of life.

Ezekiel 44:17-18 And it shall be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house. 18 They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.

The covering while serving God in His place of worship was not to be made up of linen and wool. Not self-effort. Works + God's effort = Grace. We do not work for God; we are His fellow workers and we

work *with* Him. God does practically all the work and we submit ourselves to Him. **Isaiah 26:12 You have ordained peace for us for all that we have done is Your doing.** We rest in Him, as we are already accepted, forgiven, cleansed and can enjoy working with Him and making sure He gets the pleasure.

Ecclesiastes 3:14 I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it and nothing can be taken from it. God does it that men should fear Him.

v12 Is God concerned about your cloak? Is God not writing this for you? Yes, He is. Each time you apply this key in the New Testament, it opens up the truth of the Old Testament. A cloak is your final covering. The corners are the limits of the covering. Tassels make them stand out. Recognise your gifts and limitations. Accept what you can and cannot do. Do not belittle or exalt yourself.

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Everyone has a part to play. Accept yourself. Play your part to build up the body of Christ, the church. Do not compete with others, do not envy others with different gifts. Tassels indicate the area covered. Your availability and expertise.

Conclusion

God is concerned about us. He conveys it through instructions about everyday life. Apply the key to discover more.

God does not want us to lose the blessing of sowing good spiritual seed nor lose the joy of fellowship with Himself. He wants us to give Him pleasure and find our pleasure in Him. He wants us to play our part according to the measure of the faith He has given us.

To utter worthy words, His Words, and to remain loyal to Him and use the gifts He has given us.

ONLY YOU

You alone are reading this. It is as though God is speaking to you only. As if there is no other person. God deals with each of us on a One-on-one basis. This is how He has always dealt with every person since Adam.

Matthew 7:13-14 Enter by the narrow gate... 14 difficult is the way which leads to life and few there be that find it.

Why narrow? One at a time. Not with parents, relatives, friends. You on your own with Jesus. Just the two of you. At home in you. No other way. No other name under heaven whereby we must be saved. We are all different and God deals with each one of us in a different way. The following are Biblical examples. Note how they are all One-on-one.

Adam: Given charge of God's creation; he chose to reject God and brought trouble on himself and us. By one man, sin entered the world and death through sin; so death passed on to all men for all have sinned.

Abraham: Called by God to leave his society, his family and go to an unknown destination. He was childless yet God promised descendants as the stars. He believed God and it was counted as righteousness. It was an act of grace through faith. The father of all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Promise fulfilled spiritually. How? God's business.

Moses: Thought he could it do by force and messed up. 40 years later a shepherd, a nobody. God called him. Moses asked, "Who am I?" God replied, "A nobody but I AM with you." God is in control. Moses followed His instructions. Lonely life. Aaron and Miriam hostile.

Job: Lost possessions, family, health, regarded as dead by society. Mourned for 7 days. Retained integrity. Why the suffering? Not answered. Came closer to God.

Habakkuk: God made him aware of a sinful society. God doing nothing. God using Chaldeans. Habakkuk shocked. Some things not understood. The Just shall live by the faithfulness of God.

Jonah: Called but rejected God's will. God used a storm and a fish. Second chance. Second call. One-on-one.

Paul: Singled out. Called to suffer. Responded. Reached the Gentiles. Wrote most of the New Testament.

Catherine Marshall, Watchman Nee, Hudson Taylor, Tozer: Different personalities, different gifts, different lives, different experiences of God. Each one discovered a relationship with God that God used for His glory.

Jim Elliot's Diary: Waited for God. (An evangelical Christian, who was one of five missionaries martyred while participating in Operation Auca, an attempt to evangelise the Huaorani people of Ecuador).

Do not try to copy others. You are different, your gifts, your experience, your relationship with God. You are more important to God than how He uses you. Rejoice not in how He uses you but rejoice in the fact that you are part of God's family. I have a long story to tell but so have you. Just you and the Lord. A long story of how God has dealt with me, but it will not help you because you are in a One-on-one with God, which is taught by Jesus through:

Prayer: Close the door. You and God your Father. In His presence is fullness of joy. Alone. How and how often is your business. Me? On my knees, shoeless. My wife more comfortable. We study the Bible differently. Read differently. Witness differently.

Fasting: No-one else knows. Your spiritual life. Just you and God. Attitude and motive important. Suffering for all. Known to God alone.

Giving: No-one else knows. Just you and God. John Wesley spent the same: income went up, giving went up. The more given the more blessed by God. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than receive. Stingy? **Malachi 3:10 "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."**

Ministry: Jesus' will for Peter and John. What about John, Lord? None of your business. You follow Me. How God uses each one of us is between God and you alone. Do not meddle in the ministry of another. Envy not, oppose not. Seek to keep your walk with God in the light. God works in every generation in a different way. Find out what way God is using today.

1 Kings 13 A distressing incident. Prophet sent and given specific instructions. For his ears only. Divulged it and resulted in his death. There are issues that only you and God know about. How God uses suffering is a mystery to most, as is guidance, all of which is God's business. You discover that the issue is not to doubt God. You may not understand His leading, His Word, but realise God's ways are not to be understood but above all, He is to be obeyed, worshipped and trusted that He knows what He is doing.

You and God? One-on-one. Unique. So is everyone else. An adventure of discovery. God delights in surprises. Deal only with God not man.

THE APPOINTED TIME

The term “an appointed time” keeps coming up in the Bible.

Habakkuk 2:2-3 And the Lord answered me, and said, “Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. 3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”

Hebrews 10:37-38 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

Daniel 8:19 ... for at the time appointed the end shall be.

Acts 17:31 Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.

Acts 10:42 And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 To everything there is a season . A time for every purpose under heaven. 2 A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, 3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, 6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, 7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:17 God shall judge the righteous and the wicked for there is an appointed time for every purpose and every work.

Ephesians 2:10 We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God has prepared in advance for us to walk in them.

Galatians 4:4 When the fullness of the time had come God sent forth His Son born of a woman born under the law.

Luke 24:49 Behold I send the Promise of My Father upon you but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.

Acts 1:7-8 It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. **8** But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you.

2 Timothy 1:11 I was appointed a preacher, an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles.

The Bible teaches that God has planned in advance when to work and what to do. God planned when to create this world, through His spoken Word. Let there be light and there was light. He created the seasons through the tilting of the earth and its rotation. Every plant seems to have an appointed time to bloom. All over the area whatever the foliage, certain flowers all come out at the same time.

God planned when to enter our world at His appointed time. He said that when He worked it would be done quickly. The death of the Lord Jesus Christ the Lamb of God was at an appointed time. The time of the Passover.

The Holy Spirit was poured out at an appointed time. God's time.

Habakkuk was told to wait in faith for God to work at His appointed time. **Psalm 139:16** All the days of my life were written in Your book before one of them came to be.

What is our part? Why do we not know when God is going to act? We cannot bring about the salvation of a soul. Jesus taught Nicodemus that, when He likened being born again to the wind in our atmosphere. We do not know its origin or end.

Looking back, we can all discern that God has an appointed time to bring the changes in our lives. Wait in faith repeated many times in the Bible. Because God has an appointed time to work, we need to trust Him to work in His own time. He knows what He is doing.

Now is the day of Salvation. No-one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him. If anyone comes to Jesus, He will never turn him away.

Romans 13:11 Knowing the time that now it is high time to awake out of sleep for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 Concerning the times and seasons brethren you have no need that I should write to you **2** for you yourselves know perfectly well that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 God did not appoint us to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

RUTH



READ

Ruth 1:1-5 Elimelech's Family Goes to Moab

God blessed Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, with two sons. He would have thanked the Lord for giving him sons to care for him in his old age. When famine came to the land, he took his family to Moab which was east of the Salt Sea (the Dead Sea) but north of Edom. It is drier than his home area but with a smaller population, there was the possibility that a resident alien would be able to provide for his family. Sadly, there was no evidence of Elimelech consulting the Lord as to where to go.

Naomi would have also counted herself blessed by having two sons: Mahlon and Chilion. Disaster struck when Elimelech died, but she remained in Moab. Her sons married Moabite women, but the marriages resulted in no children even after ten years. Naomi might have wondered whether it was because they had left home. Then both her sons died.

Women of the area show open distress at the loss of loved ones. Naomi was different in the way she bore the loss of her husband and sons. Maybe not a word of complaint or anger with the Lord, because they were in a foreign land. Her behaviour spoke volumes to Ruth who realized that the God of Naomi was not an idol of a particular area but One who changed people so that they were different to the locals.



READ

Ruth 1:6-22 Naomi Returns with Ruth

Naomi heard that the Lord had blessed her homeland with a good harvest. He had restored the fortunes of Zion, so she decided to return as a party of three widows. On the way, Naomi realised that she could not provide for Orpah and Ruth. She thanked them for the way they had treated her sons and herself but advised them to return to their families. Naomi wished them well and that the Lord would bless them. They wanted to stay with her but then Naomi tried to persuade them to return. Naomi made the mistake of restricting possibilities to her own ability and resources. She told them that the Lord had gone against her, causing her grief but her whole manner had an impact especially on Ruth. Because Naomi felt that the Lord was against her she did not think that He was at work to bring about His purposes. Only the Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God. God works in our lives and only afterwards looking back can we discern that apparent disaster was in fact Him working for our good.

Ruth only had the example of Naomi to realise that the God of Naomi, the Lord was the only God. What a powerful witness Naomi must have been. Her actions, her behaviour, her dealing with the loss of loved ones, her accepting the ordering of her life and the loss of family as the work of her God the Lord. Of course, her God had caused Ruth to observe and consider and make her want to be near Naomi and learn more of Naomi's God. Ruth was prepared to leave her homeland and go to a strange hostile area where she would have no family or friends apart from Naomi; a woman older than herself. She realised she would never return. She wanted Naomi's God to be her God, Naomi's society, hers. She realised she would have to adjust her behaviour, but nothing would change her decision.

Those seeking to make the only Saviour known who go to that part of the world today have to learn Arabic and the culture of the people. Food is different. Behaviour and expectations are different. They are on their own, far from their community and supporters. It takes time to make friends and be useful instruments of the Lord and for a while just their being there can be a witness provided, they do not try to impose their culture. Students walked the streets learning.

Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, that Ruth was not just being polite and saying what she thought Naomi would like to hear. Ruth would not be dissuaded. So just Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem and the people were stirred when they saw Naomi. She said that her name, meaning "pleasant", did not describe how she felt inside. She felt bitter because the Almighty had dealt bitterly with her. She was in fact saying that her character was the result of the work of God but then she came to a wrong conclusion as we all do when we do not know the ultimate purposes of God.

Naomi's evaluation of her time in Moab was totally incorrect. She went out with a husband and two sons. She returned with a daughter. There is no record of her dealings with those that had died, but she had a record of the stirring words of Ruth who valued the company of Naomi, who valued the God, the Lord of Naomi. She had not returned empty but full although at the time she did not know it. Ruth was an outstanding person in every way. A true friend, companion, hard worker, virtuous, submissive to Naomi and willing to listen and carry out instructions.

Servants of God who respond to His call and serve in lands where the church appears to remain small and weak, might have little to show for their faithful service. The Lord knows how He has used them, and they

should allow Him to value their service. Often the Lord is more interested in their character and life than how He uses them as they work with Him.

Naomi was correct in attributing to God the ordering of her life and the events that resulted in her returning to Bethlehem. The blessing of a good harvest prompted the return. The time was right as it was the beginning of the barley harvest.



READ

Ruth 2 Ruth Meets Boaz

Boaz, a relative of Elimelech and Naomi, was a wealthy landowner. He had no children and was not married. Ruth asked Naomi's permission to work in the fields after the reapers to provide for herself and Naomi. She happened to come to the field belonging to Boaz. So often God arranges apparently chance meetings to accomplish his purposes.

Boaz himself turned up and gave a greeting still used today. "The Lord be with you" to which the normal reply is "The Lord bless you". The name of God is used in so much of the Arabic language. At first, language students are reluctant to use it so freely but later they realise it is an integral part of the culture. Boaz asked about Ruth and was told that she was a foreigner, a Moabitess who had returned with Naomi. She had asked for permission to glean, which shows a pattern of behaviour of not doing anything without being given the go ahead. She showed that she was one who did not spare herself as she worked for herself and Naomi.

Boaz spoke directly to her and told her to stay in his field close to his workers. He told her that he had told his male reapers not to touch her in a sexual way and she was not to be afraid of them when she went for a drink of water. Ruth felt that she did not deserve such treatment especially since she was a foreigner with no family connections apart from Naomi.

Word went around about Ruth and her loyalty to Naomi before Boaz met her. He might have thought "So this is the woman who left her father who would have advised her and provided for her and her mother and who would have comforted her. This is the woman who had left her country for an area of unknown uncertainties to live among strangers." Boaz was a spiritual man who recognised that it was out of loyalty to the Lord God of Israel that Ruth had done all that and he trusted that God would repay her for her faith not only in thought but supported by her actions.

Ruth asked that Boaz might continue to view her with favour, which in her thoughts was undeserved. Boaz invited her to share the meal with him.

Sharing a meal is sharing life that is why Jesus wants to eat with us. Boaz gave Ruth enough roasted grain for her to eat with some left over for her to pass on to Naomi. What was left over showed that Boaz was being generous to Ruth. After the meal, Boaz made sure that what she took back would cover the needs of herself and Naomi. On her return, Naomi saw the results of Ruth's hard work and the favour of Boaz before she ate the roasted grain brought to her. Then Naomi asked how Ruth was able to glean so much. The bitterness of Naomi changed to praise of the Lord and gave God the credit for bringing Ruth into the fields of a close relative.

Ruth brought encouraging news: that Boaz was concerned about her security for the rest of the harvest. Ruth then continued working in the barley and wheat fields until that came to an end. Sometimes when nothing happens for a long time while we daily go to work, we think God is not at work but everything has its appointed time and it is only at the end of harvest that Naomi felt the need to act to secure the future of Ruth. How different is Naomi from the woman who tried to dissuade Orpah and Ruth from going with her to Bethlehem. Then she admitted she had no means of helping them and finding husbands for them. Now she acts to do that very thing. Where did she get that idea? Through the contact that Ruth had made with Boaz and the favour he had shown her. We often see insurmountable problems but when God is at work, they appear to be well within His ability to solve and accomplish His purposes.



READ

Ruth 3 Ruth's Redemption Assured

Naomi knew that Boaz was winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Separating the barley from the chaff by throwing it up. He would have been on his own. Naomi gave Ruth specific instructions on how to prepare herself and where to go and when to do it. Jesus asked the Father what to say and how to say it. God will give us the details about a course of action if we take time to listen. Ruth was only to move near to Boaz after he had gone to sleep and then to be near his feet. If only we would say and do like Ruth. She carried out all her instructions in detail.

Boaz knew nothing of her presence until midnight. He was startled and asked who it was. Ruth made herself known and asked him to spread his garment over her because she was a close relative of his or one that should redeem her to belong to him. It seems that Boaz was not married even though a rich man and he immediately praised her for her lifestyle and her choice of him. an older man.

Boaz was a man of action. He was determined to marry Ruth because of her reputation as a hard-working virtuous woman. He would not cut corners to get the matter settled. Ruth was told to stay until morning before he gave her a large amount of barley, five times more than she had gleaned on her first day. Naomi knew that Boaz would not delay. God waited a long time before He entered our world to procure our salvation. When He did, it all happened very quickly. On our part the waiting is always difficult, but we can rest assured He will carry out what He has planned.



READ

Ruth 4:1-12 Boaz Redeems Ruth

The next day Boaz met a close relative of Ruth and told him to make the property of Elimelech his own and take Ruth as his wife. The closer relative backed out of the proposal because he was already married and was unwilling to complicate the inheritance of the next generation. There was a public act before witnesses that Boaz had acquired all that belonged to Naomi and that Ruth the Moabitess had become his wife. The witnesses supported his action and wished that Ruth and Boaz would be blessed in Bethlehem. They recognised that the Lord gave children so that the line of Judah would prosper through the house of Boaz. They went on the month of honey which lasts until a child is born. How God has organised it all. Boaz unmarried and Ruth a widow without children yet as soon as they married, she bore a son. The women of the area praised the Lord for restoring Naomi and giving her strength and joy in her old age. They recognised the worth of Ruth as being of greater value than seven sons.



READ

Ruth 4:13-22 Descendants of Boaz and Ruth

Quality is more important than quantity in a society that values men more than women. The child was called Obed the firstborn of Boaz and the grandfather of King David.

What lessons do we learn from the book of Ruth? We might find fault with Elimelech taking his family to Moab. We might blame him for his own death and that of his sons. Yet apparent disaster was used by God to bring about the person of His choice to be King of His people for ultimately King Jesus was of the line of Judah and Ruth a Gentile was part of that line. The ways of God are so mysterious.

Like Naomi we come to wrong conclusions. Afterwards we discover that His purposes are best for our lives.

THE SHEPHERD'S PSALM



READ

Psalm 23 The Lord the Shepherd of His People

The psalm is written in the present tense which means that it applies to today for the Lord never changes. It was written by David, the youngest son of the family of Jesse, himself a shepherd familiar with the way the shepherd looks after his sheep. He is able to see the Lord as his shepherd and go into all the details of how a shepherd looks after his sheep.

How did the Lord become David's shepherd? He was anointed by Samuel as a result of the Lord choosing him. The youngest and looking after sheep. David did not look for the Lord, the Lord found him, just as a shepherd finds a lost sheep that can only bleat out that it is lost and lonely. David realizes that because the Lord is his shepherd, he will not lack anything. A sheep has many needs, but the Lord knows how to provide the answer for each specific need.

David was not called to be with the family when the prophet Samuel paid them a visit. We discover that he was good looking and godly. Was the latter as a result of his being anointed king in place of King Saul whom God had rejected because of his disobedience? Why was David anointed prior to the death of Saul? Samuel had anointed Saul as king, so Samuel was told to anoint David in place of Saul. In that period before he became the King, he was hounded by Saul and knew what it was to depend on God. In persecution and trials, servants of God learn a great deal as God works in them. Discovering the character of God, discovering their limitations, discovering the truth of not relying on man but only the Lord God.

Reading God's Word requires meditation at the time and afterwards. We need to see the application in life. To do this, meditation requires quiet and rest before the activity of the day takes all our attention. David recognised that the Lord ordered his life to make that possible. We have the time and need to exercise discipline to make reading and meditation possible.

All that he discovered in his relationship with the Lord God:

The Lord is my shepherd. What does a shepherd do? He looks after the sheep. He makes all the decisions. He leads the flock. The sheep follow and need a shepherd to make all the decisions. Left to themselves they go astray because they are misled by feeding without thinking.

The shepherd stops them feeding because they are ruminants which need to lie down and regurgitate what they have eaten, chew it and swallow

again. The sheep need water either drawn up from a well in a dry area or from a gently flowing stream.

The shepherd as he deals with each sheep counts them and if one is missing has to go and find it. The sheep does not know the way back on its own. Lose sight or sound of the shepherd and they are lost and helpless. It is lost until it is found. It is regarded as dead until it is restored to the flock. The shepherd makes peculiar noises known only to his flock. It is not a language but noises like curr curr isk isk skirr skirr.

There was a time when David knew the Lord was playing the same role in his life as he played in the lives of his sheep. The Lord deals with each one of His children according to their background and experience.

- Peter, a fisherman, was called by Jesus to follow Him and he would become a fisher of men.
- Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee, was called to be a teacher and expound the scriptures revealing the Messiah.
- Matthew, a tax collector, never knew that he would record the life of Jesus.
- Luke, a doctor and an able historian, would record the life of Jesus and His impact on the early church.

Some of us that have no particular gift are called to become a jack of all trades but a master of none! Yet the Lord uses what abilities we have in a variety of ways. Some of us have gifts that remain hidden.

I leave all the decisions to Him, my Shepherd. What He wants to do, where He wants me to go. How He meets my every need. How He delivers me in every situation. I recognise I am a sheep. I can do nothing on my own. I need a good shepherd. Jesus said in **John 10:14-17 I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. 15 As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. 17 Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.**

I lack nothing. My shepherd knows my needs and how to cater for those needs. Needs of food, protection, healing, leading, resting.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. Those green pastures to which He led me provide good food. After I have eaten well, He makes me lie

down to digest as a ruminant. Time to meditate on what He has taught me and see how it affects our relationship.

- Is there anything I must do?
- What have I discovered about Him?
- What have I discovered about myself?
- What have I learned that is new?
- How do I apply it in life?

He leads me beside quiet waters. A shepherd in Biblical areas leads his sheep, they follow. He stops, they stop. He moves, they move. The shepherd makes all the decisions, the sheep just follow. Quiet waters could be a slowly moving stream or a well requiring water to be drawn up into a trough so that the sheep can drink at their leisure. What comes across is the gentleness of the shepherd who cares for the needs of the sheep through causing them to lie down and drink unhurriedly.

Jesus said, “If anyone is thirsty let him come unto Me and drink.” That water will become like rivers quenching the thirst of others. The Holy Spirit, once received, will do in others what He does in those who come to Jesus. The Holy Spirit is not for a select few but for the select many.

He restores my soul. Sheep go astray. They wander into a vineyard resulting in damage. The owner of the vineyard would take the sheep as compensation for the damage caused. The shepherd pays the owner of the vineyard for the damage so that the sheep can be restored to the flock. We all need restoration of the soul. We might realize our need and our going astray but only the Lord can restore us spiritually. Jesus pays the price demanded for our sinful lives so that we can be delivered from slavery and become free once more to follow the Good Shepherd. Every sheep has that experience before it can really experience the pleasure of being part of the flock and owned by the shepherd.

He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake. The Lord can only act in accordance with His character and nature. However, David recognises that he needs to follow the shepherd who will lead him in right paths. The Lord's actions will never go contrary to His Word which reveals the kind of God He is. Clearly David has a sense of certainty and deep assurance. No fear that he will go astray provided he follows and does not run ahead on his own.

God will never guide His children contrary to His character. He guides me to walk with Him along the path He chooses because it is in line with His character. It is the road He has chosen therefore He knows it is the best

road for me to walk to find food and enjoy His company. Sometimes He tests us in ways that seem strange, but He is able to guide and provide in such a way that we are drawn closer to Him.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me. A change takes place as David thinks about the times when his life was in danger. Up until now, David views the work of the shepherd from the viewpoint of the shepherd and all that the Lord does in his life. Then because of trials and trouble David views it from the sheep's point of view and its needs. *He* changes to *You*. Trials have that effect. We become conscious of our personal needs and our situation and realise that the Shepherd has the remedy for every problem. David has specific needs at specific times so our prayers should be specific with expectancy. The change is the pronoun. Danger and trouble causes those that are sheep to rely more closely on their shepherd, and salvation becomes more personal. The shepherd is seen as a friend. Not just he but **You**. You are with me. You deliver me by being with me in the situation. I rely only on You for deliverance. It has become very personal.

Sometimes the shepherd has to take his flock from one well-grazed area to another through a ravine hidden from the sun. Only the voice of the shepherd is heard as the sheep lose sight of him in the darkness. He will make many sounds to reassure them of his presence. He knows where he is going and there are times of darkness, we all pass through when we are not sure of the outcome, but the Lord will never leave us. He will guide us with His counsel and afterwards receive us into His glorious presence.

I will fear no evil for You are with me. God will not allow us to be tested beyond what we could bear but will provide a way of escape that we might be able to endure the trial.

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. The shepherd must make sure that a sheep is not lost and far from the sound and care of the shepherd. The staff is used to protect the sheep from enemies. The shepherd is prepared for the unknown and unexpected.

The sheep need attention. Thorns and sharp rocks could cause injuries so the shepherd needs to examine each one as he holds the sheep and keeps it from moving by placing a rod on its neck so he can attend to the injuries by pouring on olive oil or resin from trees to bring about healing. It is close attentive application by the shepherd to that particular sheep. Each one has the same careful treatment. The shepherd has to be on the look-out for wild animals. David spoke how he had dealt with a lion and a bear.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. A table of food where the shepherd removes plants that would harm. You attend to my needs and are in control of my enemies so that they cannot harm me. In other words, in times of danger You stay with me.

At times the shepherd taking personal interest in each sheep will not just wait until the end of the day but will act as the need arises. The Lord is thus involved in every aspect of our lives. We might have our scheduled times of meeting with Him, but need can come at any time anywhere. Because the Lord never leaves us as He promised, we must readily turn to our Shepherd who knows what to do.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Olive oil applied to cuts to bring healing and a large cup of water is placed under the mouth of the sheep to drink. All of this takes place as the sheep waits and allows the shepherd to carefully examine and care for its needs. Cup overflowing is to teach that the shepherd provides more than is needed. The good shepherd is generous. The sheep is valuable; His treasured possession. It is only a sheep, but it's the Shepherd who makes the difference.

Surely goodness and mercy will accompany me all the days of my life. What God starts; He will bring to completion. No purpose of His can be thwarted. The Lord is good to all. God loves His children as much as He loves His Son. No sense of fear. Respect is present but there is freedom to worship, to thank and adore the One who is the good shepherd.

I will live in the house of the Lord forever. David, a shepherd, follows the Shepherd and afterwards discovers that goodness and forgiveness has been his experience every day of his life. Every need attended to, every problem solved, with the assurance of staying in the house of his Shepherd and always being in His presence.

David looked forward to being in His presence forever. There will be no boasting or talking about ourselves in heaven. We will all have a testimony of how our Shepherd has led and provided and kept and restored and met every need and how great it is to be with Him.

Jesus the good shepherd said **John 14:2 In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.**

He was going to prepare a place for those who once were like lost sheep going astray but who would be sharing eternity with Him. A close relationship.

THE THREE PSALM

Psalm 32



READ

Psalm 32 The Joy of Forgiveness

Psalm 32 has seven “threes” to help us remember its content, but before we examine its message, we will record its structure:

Three **words to describe sin:**

- Transgression.
- Sin.
- Iniquity.

Three **words to deal with sin:**

- Forgiven.
- Covered.
- Not imputed.

Three **results of not confessing our sin:**

- Physical weakness.
- The heavy hand of the Lord.
- Vitality gone.

Three **actions required:**

- Sin acknowledged.
- Iniquity not hidden.
- Transgressions confessed.

Three **results of restoration:**

- God our hiding place.
- Preserved from trouble.
- Songs of deliverance.

Three **promises of guidance:**

- Instruct.
- Teach.
- Guide.

Three **words of exhortation:**

- Be glad in the Lord.
- Rejoice.
- Shout for joy.

By noting the structure helps us to remember the content even if we do not memorise the psalm.

- Transgression means an act of rebellion, of rejecting the requirements of God and going his own way.
- Sin is the straying away from walking along the path set for him by God.
- Iniquity is his inner depravity and opposition to the holiness God requires.

David is aware that he is guilty of all three and that all three must be dealt with by God who alone can forgive. We should never be vague when dealing with God and the sin problem in our lives. God wants to forgive provided we are honest and willing to expose all to Him.

David kept quiet about his sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah for at least nine months. Maybe he thought it was something forgotten but there were immediate consequences. He lost the joy of his salvation and he seemed to age quickly. He realized that God was making life difficult, no longer in support but draining him of the vitality of life he once had. No longer the young man, strong in the strength of the Lord when he faced Goliath. Sin affects us and our activities and our relationships. Only God can deal with sin. He has already done so. A man once said that he was ashamed of his past. But God was not interested in his past as He had already dealt with it through the death of His Son. How would that man respond to the Son was the decision he had to make. What would he do with Jesus?

Looking back through his experience, David emphasizes the blessing or happiness he experienced after every aspect of his sin had been dealt with. Blessed or happy is in sharp contrast to the consequences of trying to cover up sin. **Proverbs 28:13 He who covers his sin will not prosper but he who confesses and forsakes his sin will obtain mercy.**

Through His servant Nathan the prophet, David's sin was brought into the open and he no longer tried to hide it. Nathan was able to tell David that God had forgiven his sins but there would be consequences. David responded in detail to every aspect of his sin. He acknowledged that he was in agreement with God regarding his going his own way, his inner depravity was not concealed, and he decided to confess that he had by his actions, revolted against the Word of God. The moment he took that decision God forgave him. The words we use are not that important but the decision to confess and submit to God is.

- “Forgiven” is to lift a burden that is making life heavy and giving us heaviness of spirit.
- “Covered” is the hiding of the record of sin.
- “Imputes not” is the cancelling of what we owe to God.

God can only forgive David because of His future intervention through great David's greater son Jesus Christ taking on Himself all our sin. Sin has to be punished but the sinner rescued at the same time. Only the Arm of

the Lord could do that. **Isaiah 59:16 Therefore His arm brought salvation unto him and his righteousness, it sustained him.**

In verse 6 David declares that anyone who walks with God and goes through times of trial will find that contact with God can be made while they are alive. God is able in the time of testing to deliver His people. David then reaffirms that the Lord is a refuge from danger, a preserver who is in control of the troubles of life so that they do not overwhelm him. He has been restored to fellowship with God and His people.

The Lord is now able to resume His instruction of David. He promises to personally show David how he should live and the decisions he must make in his life. Now nothing comes between the Lord and David. He will counsel with His eye watching the way ahead and knowing exactly what to do. David is to rely on that because the Lord does not want to use methods that cause pain to teach and guide him but rather a gentle word that is very personal and private.

David realises that those who persist in their rejection of what God wants for their lives, will experience many sorrows without a refuge and without forgiveness and without One to preserve and teach. However, those who trust in the Lord will be surrounded by His loving kindness which is very considerate and only wants the best for His children.

David speaks to himself and to others to do three things in response to the forgiveness of God:

- **Be glad in the Lord:** This takes the place of inner depravity of spirit.
- **Rejoice:** This takes the place of groaning and loss of vitality.
- **Shout for joy:** This takes the place of his keeping silent.

When God does a work of grace the only response can be of an open expression of gratitude, rejoicing and praise. We should be a joyful people, a different people, a people with a message of hope of turning sorrow to joy and heaviness of spirit to the lightness of new life and above all, a new creation. We dare not remain silent.

The seven threes hardly need expounding as it is clear what the results of sin are and what happens when man is honest with God. There is nothing like forgiveness and restoration in your relationship with God needed in life on earth before eternity.

Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

TALKING TO YOURSELF

Psalm 42



READ

Psalm 42 Yearning for God in the Midst of Distresses

Do you talk to yourself? You should because people in the Bible did so as in this Psalm. Negative critical thoughts pour into your mind and depress you. That is the time to preach a sermon to yourself. We like to teach others, but we need to apply the scriptures to our spirit and counter attempts to weigh us down with woe.

It can get very dry and hot in the areas around Galilee, the Jordan River and the mountains of Lebanon. The Psalmist is going through a period of spiritual drought and feels the absence of the active presence of God. God is present everywhere at all times but at times withdraws the consciousness of that presence. He is there but apparently not involved. So, the Psalmist longs for God Himself. Not for what He does but for God Himself. He recognises that the active presence of God is sufficient to change a situation. Jesus in **Revelation 3:20** reminded the Laodicean church that they had left Him out of their lives and needed to invite Him in daily.

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.

Note that it was to be a daily event to eat/sup with us. He does not enter our circumstances until we acknowledge our need of Him.

A missionary returned home and gave gifts to his children. One child said that she was glad he was back and that the gift was unimportant. This was clearly the desire of the Psalmist. He wanted to experience the face and favour of God. He had no answer for those who asked where his God was. Clearly, he was going through a trial made more difficult by those who mocked him and his relationship with God. It filled his heart with sorrow.

How does one deal with such a situation? Follow the steps of the Psalmist:

v1-3 He was honest with himself and God. He recognised he had no answers only tears. He had a true picture of himself and wanted change which only God could bring about.

v4 He remembered that this was only a temporary experience as in the past he recalled and reminded himself that he used to go with others to the house of God with joy and praise with those that remembered

what God had done in the past. So, you too should remember the faithfulness and goodness of God that prompted you to want to worship Him and enabled you to praise God with joy in your heart.

- v5 Time to talk to himself. He asked himself what the reason was for his being depressed and discouraged? There must be a reason. When did it start? He still does not have the answer but tells himself to hope in God and that praise shall return. He affirms his confidence in God to restore him by looking upon him with favour.
- v6 He now deals directly with God and tells Him exactly how he feels. Nothing can take the place of sharing with God. He remembers again the blessings of God in terms of abundance of water. At the moment, he feels all dried up inside but remembered the land of the Jordan that has water and green vegetation all year round. Mt Hermon or Jebel Sheikh the Old Man Mt which is covered with snow in winter to feed the River Jordan running through the hills where there are springs. "Ain" in Arabic is the name for a spring and villages would be clustered around *springs* on beds of clay. He remembered the waterfalls and the times when there was much refreshment in his walk with God.
- v8 Is a sense of anticipation that the Lord will take the decision to exercise His kindness in the day resulting in a song in his heart at night.
- v9 He now asks God directly what the reason was for the period of little blessing and spiritual drought. Why is it that those opposed to God are mocking him and questioning his trust in the Lord?
- v11 Similar to v5 but there is a different note. He spoke to himself twice in the space of a few verses but when the enemy comes in like a flood, he must be resisted. He encouraged himself to hope and trust in God because he was determined to praise Him for His salvation. He stated that God was his God.

We too, need to take a step of faith in dark times showing that we will not be weighed down by circumstances and those servants of the enemy. It is difficult to praise God in advance.

Psalm 50:23 Who offers praise glorifies Me and prepares the way for Me to show him the salvation of God.

We should show the same determination to exercise faith in God to restore His joy and confirm Him to be my Saviour and my God.

THE RICH MAN WHO THOUGHT HE WAS POOR

Psalm 73

The Psalms are divided into five books:

- Book 1: Psalms 1 to 41 God beside us
- Book 2: Psalms 42 to 72 God going before us
- Book 3: Psalms 73 to 89 God around us
- Book 4: Psalms 90 to 106 God above us
- Book 5: Psalms 107 to 150 God among us

Psalm 73 is a Psalm of Asaph who was in charge of the musicians in the time of David. This is one of the few Psalms that speak of the hope of sharing eternity with God.

The Psalmist is a believer who has experienced the transforming work of God in his life. He lived in a society that believed that material blessing was a sign of spiritual blessing. God had started a work in his life emphasizing purity of heart and he had acted to see to it that his heart was clean and his behaviour in line with his heart.

The heart in the Old Testament is the seat of the intellect. **Psalm 119:11 Your Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against You.**

Holiness of mind and behaviour became top priority but what was the result? Not what he expected. **John 15:2 Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes that it might bear more fruit.**

God saw his response and desire to be holy and responded by exerting an even closer control over his life. The closer we come to the Light, the more we see that which has to be removed, cleansed and forgiven.

Ezekiel 36:26-31 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and you will keep My statutes and do them. 29 I will deliver you from all your uncleanness...31 then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good. The moment you really mean business with God, God will be seen to be actively involved in your life.

It is so easy to go through the motions and only pay lip service to the truth. The Lord knows our intentions and our state of mind. He knows our level of commitment. Jesus was not prepared to reveal the source of His authority when those He questioned were not prepared to give an honest answer. The moment men like Nathanael and the centurion were willing

to be honest and trust Him, Jesus dealt personally with them. God knows your level of commitment. Jesus will act accordingly.

The Psalmist realised there was something missing. He thought that there would be material blessing as well. There might have been but certainly not on the scale of the businessmen of his day. He was a musician in the temple, hardly top of the pops with no discs in those days. He found out that as far as prosperity was concerned, he was being left behind. He lost sight of the invisible and saw the visible manifestation of the prosperity of the people opposed to God.

Asaph saw the facts and made no attempt to cover up about the way he felt but he was not prepared to voice his doubts because this was a matter between him and God alone, it was a One-on-one encounter and he did not want to cause trouble for other followers of God who might stumble because of his doubts. He knew intuitively that his initial understanding of the matter was not the correct one. He also knew that there was something wrong with his perceptions of the matter.



READ

Psalm 73:1-28 The Tragedy of the Wicked, and the Blessedness of Trust in God

- v1 The Psalmist states what is taught in Scripture about the goodness of God to those who are pure in heart followed by a BUT...
- v2 His own experience caused him to question the statement.
- v3 He lost sight of the Lord God and envied those who prospered even though they were arrogant and wicked. He considered their way of life in detail.
- v4 Health was a form of security. It was a defence in times of trouble, it carried them through to the end of their lives.
- v5 The wicked seem to have no health problems, they do not waste time worrying about the problems of life and seem to escape when diseases afflict the nation. Plenty causes them to have no lack of confidence because it is a sign that God has blessed them.
- v6 Pride, boasting and many words flow without any fear that they will have to give an account to God.
- v9 They are not at all conscious of the existence of God and the fact that He does nothing and seems to be asleep almost proves that the wicked are right. Jesus spoke of the deceitfulness of riches.

v10 They acted as though God approved of how they lived and ignored their riding roughshod over those around them. Their thoughts were out of control. They do what they like resulting in harm for others that are struggling in life. They speak as though they are the answer for the way God should act and on earth they act as rulers. This results in their popularity with people who themselves live out of the control of God.

v11 They say that God is not involved and therefore it shows that He does not know what is happening and does not do anything. The wicked seem to have no cares as they become wealthier.

v12 The Psalmist observed the wicked prospering without God's participation. Many in Bible lands think that prosperity is a sign of being blessed by God and that was because their lives pleased God.

v13 He did not see himself as one of the wicked. What made him think like this and envy those that did as they liked and prospered?

He was conscious of himself and "I" and "my" are much repeated. This is one of the quickest ways of detecting that all is not well with my soul. When "I" and "my" dominates my speech and outlook in life.

Proverbs 14:14 The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways.

When you are in that state of mind, any decision you reach in the spiritual sphere is suspect. A backslider is always critical of others. He sees himself in the best possible light and others in the worst.

Surely my seeking to have a pure heart has not resulted in the fringe benefits of prosperity.

v14 I have concentrated on seeking to please God in my daily living. Yet I have suffered. You, God have chastened me. You do not let me get away with anything. You are involved in the details of my life every day. This has all caused me to have many doubts and question whether my seeking a good relationship with You, has benefited me in any way.

v15 I kept my doubts to myself because I did not want to cause those that belong to You to doubt.

v16 My problem was that You allowed the wicked to prosper and behave and think as they liked but those that see themselves as Your children, You discipline and stop them behaving in ways that do not please You.

v17 My inner conflict ceased when I went into Your house and saw the final destiny of the wicked. They might do as they like and live lives without

thought of You but when their lives come to an end, they will have to deal with You.

Every problem has an “until”. God’s answers come in ways we least expect, and it is so that the *UNTIL* is indelibly impressed on our minds. The Psalmist thought about himself and the results of his behaviour. Nothing!

Micah 7:8-9 Do not rejoice my enemy. When I fall I will arise. When I sit in darkness the Lord will be a light to me. 9 I will bear the indignation of the Lord UNTIL He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light and I will see His righteousness.

v18 They do not arrive in a safe secure place.

v19 They lose everything and are overwhelmed by fear. You are holy. Without holiness no one shall live with the Lord.

v20 Their lives were like a dream, over so quickly and totally rejected by the only God. The destiny of those that have no relationship with God is an eternity of fear.

A change takes place. In the sanctuary of God, God’s house, I understood their end. He saw the wicked from God’s point of view and no longer his own. No longer does he use “I” and “my” or “they” but now he uses “You” which is repeated many times. The wicked will have no part in the presence of God. Yet even when Asaph was at his worst spiritually, he was always with God. Even though in darkness, he knew the Lord had not left him.

v21 Asaph knew that all was not well. He did not have the answer, in fact he was sorely troubled in mind.

v22 He did not seem to have any insight and found that he was just existing. The joy of his salvation had disappeared.

In Pilgrim’s Progress, Christian only came to Doubting Castle and Giant Despair after he had been on the road to the Eternal city for a long time. We all go through such times in our spiritual pilgrimage. Students going to university and doing Biblical studies will have their belief in the inerrancy of the Bible challenged, their Saviour dishonoured and their faith severely tested. Second-hand faith will quickly fall away.

A marriage that goes sour, tragedy in the home, financial disaster, severe testing or demonic oppression can all cause the past faithfulness

of God to blur and be forgotten as the particular problem looms so large that it fills the mind.

Deep down Asaph knew that there was an answer, therefore he was not prepared to speak to anyone about it. Why did he go to the house of God? For Asaph it was his life! In other words, he persisted in worshipping God even though he felt the exact opposite. He probably felt he was dragging himself to participate.

The mature Christian is one who persists in following the Lord even though there is no joy, no apparent blessing, darkness fills the mind, he still seeks the glory of God and will do his best to see that his problems will not cause others to fall. He will continue to read God's Word, the Bible, even though it seems dry. God wants to teach him that it is the Holy Spirit that gives insight, blessing and a desire to worship. The Christian knows that Jesus is his life, his Saviour and no other. Jesus only has the words of eternal life.

Asaph placed himself where God could reach him. Through the Word of God preached. In God's house. Light and insight poured into his mind and the problem was solved.

The Psalmist thought about what had happened to him when he lost sight of his God and his relationship with Him. His heart was sad, and he had a bitter spirit. No longer rejoicing and no longer thankful, he had forgotten the details of the character of God. He had become like an animal and had lost sight of the fact that he was a soul that had communication with his Creator. His communications with Him had become disconnected. But all that changed when he entered God's house of prayer. He once more saw the eternal God and lost sight of sinful man who faced separation from God forever. He discovered once more that God is unchanging, faithful, compassionate, caring, acted like a father, exercised discipline to do him good, not wanting that any of His children should be lost.

v23 Asaph reverses the usual statement of scripture that "God is with us". Asaph says, "I am continually with You." He is excited, he has made a fresh discovery. The wicked do not know You even exist, but I am always with You. Wow! Even at my worst, when I am up or down, I belong to You, I am Your possession. The wicked will leave their security behind, but You are my security. You hold my right hand. You Lord have a firm grip on my life right now.

Gone were his worries about the prosperity of the wicked, only God fills his mind.

v24 Concerning the future, Asaph expresses his confidence that he can count on the guidance of God and His counsel, which is the result of the outworking of his being with God. God will not guide from a distance but be involved in every decision where He is welcome. The best is yet to be. Afterwards You will receive me to glory. No mention of an end, no break in the relationship, no mention of death. The life I have continues for eternity.

You will receive and welcome me. You will be waiting for me. You are on the other side. You are with me now, You will be with me later and You will be with me always.

Lord that is fantastic. Oh, how foolish I was, I behaved like an animal for an animal cannot have You as his friend and guide. Asaph is an exception amongst the Psalmists, eternity is real.

v25 Whom have I in heaven but You? When I get there, You will be waiting to receive me. The relationship I have with You will never end. Something to look forward to. Unlike the wicked who are consumed by terror with no respite. Now when You are with me, I desire nothing else on earth. I see everything in the light of who You are and Your character and ways of thinking and working.

v26 I might grow weaker physically in old age, but You keep me strong spiritually so that I am kept young inside and You are my inheritance, my portion in life and beyond. You tell me what to do because You know exactly the right course of action. You know the future. All my life You will guide me and eventually receive me into Your visible presence. There is no mention of a break-through death. He that has the Son has life before he dies, and it will continue in eternity.

Physically I will get older and my body will start to malfunction, but God keeps me young inside and is my portion forever. I look forward to just being with You. You Lord, through the joy of Your presence in my life, keep me younger than the body that is getting weaker.

v27 The wicked who are far from You will only have a short time. Their end will be in a moment followed by great awfulness of experience that will never end. Those who have a divided heart or who are unfaithful to You will come to an end.

v28 You are beside me, a very special sense of the presence of God. When that happens all the questions like “Why Lord?” “Why this or that?” all fall away as unimportant. On earth and in heaven I have you. One on one. You Lord are all I desire. You are my delight. Wealth has to be left behind but I will never leave You behind. Wealth is what I have in my possession. I am continually with You, in fact I am Your possession, I belong to You, that is why You will guide me and receive me to glory. What belongs to us will be left behind. What belongs to God will never be left behind.

Pure in heart is an undivided heart, a resolve to be faithful to the Lord for better or for worse. God is good to Israel. God is good to His people whom He has bought with the death of His Son. It is good for me to draw near to God. It gives me pleasure. God is good to those pure in heart. I have put my trust in the Lord that I might declare all Your works.

No longer envying the wicked but realising that those who are separated from God by sin will perish eternally. A great gulf fixed which God cannot bridge when a person has rejected God’s bridge of Jesus dying for sin and rising again. A reminder to himself to keep trusting, keep being faithful to God even though he does not understand what God is doing or what God has planned.

The Psalmist reinforces what he has learned and reaffirms that it is good to be near God. Sin has been dealt with and nothing separates him from God. I have made the Lord God my refuge. Not prosperity. Not money. But what God has done for me and others. Instead of envying the wicked, to tell them there is a way back to God and to discover true wealth that will not be left behind.

How extremely rich Asaph was all the time and he thought once that he seemed to be poverty-stricken even though he belonged to God and served Him.

He is the rich man who thought he was poor. Today he is still enjoying being rich. Will you?

THE LIFE OF FAITH

Psalm 120 to 134

God calls us. Many are called but few are chosen. Everyone who comes to faith in Christ, comes through God using very personal private means. He gets us alone so that it is as if there is no one else. He so organises our circumstances that we realise there is no alternative to trusting Him.

Faith comes before repentance; we all come to believe that God will reward those that diligently seek Him. We reach out to Him expecting Him to respond. It could be a call for help, or a crying out in despair. When Jesus called Saul there was no mention of his sin or his destruction of the church but his persecution of Jesus Himself. Later he, like us, came to realise how sinful he was and how his sin nailed Jesus to the Cross.

- Jesus said to Peter “Follow Me and I will make you a fisher of men.”
- Jesus said to Matthew “Follow Me.”
- To Zacchaeus “Come down Zacchaeus. I must eat in your house today.”
- To the woman at the well “If you knew who I am you would have asked of Me and I would give you living water.”
- To a blind man “Do you believe in the Son of God?” “Who is He?” “You are seeing Him, and He is talking with you.”

Each had his own experience. So do we.

Our mistake is to think that that is the way others should come to faith in Christ. Not so. We are all different. Different personalities, different circumstances, different needs. God takes all of that into account. So, we should never think that God treats people like an assembly line.

A Jew that came to faith in Christ after he prayed asking God to show him if Jesus was the Messiah or anointed/chosen One of God for our salvation.

A Moslem came to faith in Jesus through reading the Quran. Others were shocked. They could not believe it. God did it. He was asked “What is the purpose of your life?” His reply: “You need to be forgiven. Why not ask Jesus now?”

God will give us the right questions to ask and words to pass on. We are all in different stages of spiritual growth. Some are children, some are teenagers, some young adults, mature adults, young old, old old, unreachable. All need different treatment. After salvation, there is a honeymoon period. Everything goes right. Prayers are answered immediately. Apparent blessing and God uses us to help others. Answers to prayer, miracles of provision, souls saved through testimony.

God uses shock treatment. Personal awareness of sinfulness in so many aspects of life. “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man” said Peter. Mistakes made through wrong decisions. A realisation dawns that Jesus’ resurrection life is needed not just to save from sin but in every aspect of life. Without Me you can do nothing. Big decisions that will echo a lifetime.

Career, business, marriage, children, so important because going astray can lead to much heartache. Yet Jesus waits. He allows us freedom of choice. Will we choose what He chooses, will we seek His advice and consult His family members and wait for Him to intervene?

Jesus calls some to leave home, family, friends, society. God does not economise. He calls people from Ireland to go to Africa. Some from Africa to go to Europe, to the Middle East, to Papua New Guinea. A family to work with USA Sioux tribes because they are the same colour. But why? To get them out of their comfort zone so they have to trust in God alone.

Through it all they come closer to God. They learn things not from books but THE book, the Bible. They work with God. Learn to wait for Him to make the breakthrough. Trust Him to provide for their needs. They discover that He does much more than that. God gives them what they never dreamt of. Paid holidays. A much larger family than the one they left. The meeting of all their needs. Even a vehicle.

They learn to do the plumbing, bricklaying, electricity, repair cars, paint for pleasure and for others, all with the help of God.

Sometimes God works in ways that mystify His servants. At first the apostle Paul could not understand why God had given him a thorn in the flesh but later realised it was to keep him humble, usable, teachable.

Others might be given a thorn in the spirit or some ongoing weakness or problem that makes them sense their need daily of the Lord. Other times, they do not understand why things all go wrong. Illness, death in the family. Hostility from society. Guidance that resulted in His servants thinking that they were misled and who or what can they trust. Financial stress and investments that turn sour. This is a period we could call a time of darkness as **Micah** said in **7:8-9 Do not rejoice over me my enemy when I fall, I will arise. When I sit in darkness the Lord will be a light to me. 9 I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him until He pleads my case and executes judgement for me. He will bring me forth to the light. I will see His righteousness.**

There are times when it is not because of personal sin. Often, we will cry “Why Lord?” Time to change the “why” to “what Lord do you want to teach me through these events?” An old worker was in hospital and he asked many times “why Lord?” But then he changed his question to, “Lord what do You want to teach me here?” God gives us an overview of how He deals with us.

Psalms 120 to 134 consists of five sets of three Psalms.

The first of each set is a psalm of distress or need, followed by a psalm of dependence or relying on the Lord and ending with a psalm of deliverance and enjoying the Lord.

They are a Psalm of Trial then one of Trust followed by Triumph. It would seem to cover the whole life of one that belongs to God’s family because this happens to everyone who seeks to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are various ideas of the origin of the Psalms of Ascents. They describe the life of a pilgrim or follower of God. It is a gentle roller coaster ride through life. It teaches that we will all experience trials and tests of various kinds which will cause us to turn afresh to the Lord God and trust Him alone for deliverance. We then experience a period of rest before we face the next period of trial. It emphasises that holiness is not a quick fix or a single experience but a process. Trials are part of the Lord’s method of causing us to exercise faith in Him. If those that come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ were taught this, it would help them to realise that an adventure lies before them of involving God in every detail of their lives and not looking for an additional experience that is often taught to end the cycle of trials which is the common lot of all followers of Jesus.

Trials and persecution are part of life and will be experienced by all who seek to please God because of what He has done for them. Trials cause us to turn afresh to God and trust Him alone to overcome and continue the life of faith. The Lord then brings us into a period of rest as in the book of Hebrews, or deliverance, free of trials until the next test of our faith or problem we face and this is repeated five times, to show us that this can be expected to happen to us in the life of faith in God.

We should not be distressed by thinking that trials or tests of our faith should not happen because our sins have been forgiven by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ and we are born again, and the Holy Spirit is living in us. Some attempt to teach that the victorious life is lived without failure on our part, but we are frail and quick to go astray. Indeed, if we

kept on trusting in Jesus to complete the work He has begun in us, we would never experience defeat.

But anyone will tell you that for various reasons we stop following our Good Shepherd and no longer hear His voice. We become too busy, too prosperous and other interests or activities wrap their arms around us and Jesus fades into the background. God has His own way of exercising discipline through trials, difficulties, ill-health, old age, weakness or circumstances beyond our ability to overcome on our own. We turn to reading the experiences of others and might have temporary relief, but we need to deal directly with God and discover His way of gaining the victory by depending only on Him.

The Bible teaches that **Romans 1:17 The just shall live by faith.** There is no other way. Faith in who God is and what He has done to bring about our salvation. God will work in our lives so that we do not take any of the credit that belongs to Him alone. God has spoken, “My glory I will not give to another.”

No one in the presence of God will ever say that he or she is there because of what they had done. That is why the fifteen psalms have five times the same set but different trials. Think of the tests in the wilderness as Moses led the people. The people failed every time. Instead of praising God each time a trial or test came their way such as no water, no food, bitter water, snakes, enemies, they could have responded by praising God that He would deliver or provide but they chose to complain and grumble and wanted to return to the slavery they experienced in Egypt where they had full stomachs. Likewise, God is pleased when we exercise faith and praise Him as we face each new trial or test of our faith. God seems to wait too long, but He has His own reasons, His own appointed time. He wants to keep changing us and keep us trusting Him. He delights in doing the unexpected. Moses was told to strike the barren rock to get water. The next time just to speak to the rock. Another to come to wells of water where the rock was hidden below the water.

In my case God, provided a house for us by acting four years in advance. Then He provided a house for our children before He called them to serve Him in the same land. God did it in different ways but they and us are living in a miracle. We should therefore continue to trust Him to show us the next step. Different psalms by different people but a set of psalms teaching about the life of a person seeking to please God. His experience is the same as everyone that has been called and adopted by God to be part of His family.



READ – A PSALM OF TRIAL OR DISTRESS

Psalm 120 Plea for Relief from Bitter Foes

The Psalmist had a relationship with the Lord; however he was conscious that he did not always tell the truth like others of his society. He recognised the need of radical action so that he always told the truth in every situation. He was aware that he had been living too long amongst those who do not seek peace. In other words, he is not enjoying the presence of God as a result of his own actions and the company he has kept.

He turned to the Lord alone for deliverance and knew that the Lord would rescue him in due time. We wonder why restoration is not a quick fix, but we have to realise that sin is serious and not to be regarded lightly. God restores us once we have learnt the lesson well.

What will the Lord do to those who live a lie? He will punish them. Fire describes God's judgement.

Revelation 8:5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

The follower of God has been living amongst the Meshech people whose origin was in the hills East of Cilicia and who moved later to the area around the Black Sea.

Others were from the tents of Kedar, a Bedouin tribe living in Arabia of the line of Ishmael (**Genesis 25:13**), who were hostile towards the descendants of Isaac and Jacob. He sees himself as a man of peace living among those who wanted to wage war out of envy of those blessed by the Lord.

Through this time of trial or distress the Lord has got his attention and responded to his plea for salvation. He realises that he must change his area of habitation. He does not retaliate but leaves it to the Lord to deal with those who trouble him.



READ – A PSALM OF TRUST OR DEPENDENCE

Psalm 121 God the Help of Those Who Seek Him

A psalm of relying on the Lord. He is looking ahead at the horizon and sees the sky and the hills meeting and is aware that the Lord made the heavens and the earth. He made the invisible and the visible, the known and the unknown, the concrete and the abstract. His help comes from Him, the Creator. The One who knows how to deliver in times of trial or distress.

He is assured that the Lord will keep him from stumbling which might happen in the day or night, the time of light or darkness. When one slips or falls, when he stumbles in his walk due to hostility of others or his own waywardness, the Lord will allow it to be but only as a temporary setback.

The Lord never sleeps and is never taken by surprise. The Lord will protect him at all times, day or night. He thinks of the forces of creation, of the forces of evil and darkness and whether he be far from home or near. His confidence is totally in the Lord and the Psalm hardly mentions the Psalmist but concentrates all its attention on the ability of the Lord.

Psalm 37:23-24 The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and He delighteth in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand.

Why is the Lord able to do this? Because He is not like man who falls asleep or gets drowsy. He knows the situation whatever it is and knows how to rectify it and keep His child on track.

Psalm 32:8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye.

He knows where you are and the direction you are taking. Day or night, light and heat of the sun or the darkness and cold and danger of the night, He is present. Shading you like a tree from the sun and at your right hand protecting you in the night. In other words, the Lord is present all the time because He fills heaven and earth. He knows your thoughts, words and actions. Everything is done in His presence. The Lord goes ahead of you and is behind you. Whom have I in heaven but You and when You are beside me, I desire nothing else on earth. Neither do I live in fear.

The Lord will be with me when I leave home and when I return. I am never out of His presence for time and eternity. This is a period of trusting the Lord in every aspect of my life.



READ – A PSALM OF DELIVERANCE OR TRIUMPH

Psalm 122 The Joy of Going to the House of the Lord

A Psalm of rejoicing as a result of changing from the awareness of a trial to that of the Lord and His ability to deliver. Now he is rejoicing and the thought of being in the house of the Lord, a place of worship fills him with joy. It is a place where people from various circumstances and backgrounds meet to share what the Lord has done for them and be united in thanking Him. The place of meeting to worship the Lord needs prayer so that nothing happens to divide or cause trouble amongst those that assemble to

worship. The emphasis is on the house of the Lord and seeking, that it will be a place that is a witness in the area and beyond.

If you consider the roller coaster ride from the depth of trial rising through faith in the Lord to a peak of being in His presence but for how long? Until the next trial in Psalm 123. The Lord gives peace and rest to His children because He alone knows what is ahead of them.

Worshipping the Lord was not just a habit but a time of rejoicing in Him and who He is and what He has done to bring about change in my life.

It is said that King David composed this Psalm, but the house of the Lord was not built in his lifetime. Jerusalem existed in the time of Melchizedek who was the king of Salem and brought bread and wine to Abraham. But David built up the city that was compacted together as he joined the lower city with the thrones of judgement and the house of David. A place of peace and security. A place to praise the name of the Lord.

The Psalmist urges others to join with him in praying for the peace and security of Jerusalem. His wish is that those who love that city know inner peace and security. If I want to have peace in my family and society then I must pray for peace for the city so that when people go there to worship the Lord in His house, he will pray that the city prospers. He himself is going through a period of rest.



READ – A PSALM OF TRIAL OR TROUBLE

Psalm 123 Prayer for Relief from Contempt

The Psalmist felt a deep sense of unworthiness. He was always unworthy of the goodness and forgiveness of the Lord, but this was exacerbated when those around him prospered and looked down on those that followed the Lord. People that prospered thought that God was on their side and looked down on those that valued their relationship with the Lord. In his need, he cried out to the Lord to extend forgiveness and lift him up and bring him closer to the Lord. **1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time.**

The Psalmist and those who seek to follow and obey God are going through trial or trouble. In Psalm 121, he looked at the horizon and saw the line of hills separating sky and earth. Now he looks beyond that to the One who is enthroned in the heavens. What has caused this? A period of trial. Opposition from those who seek to do harm.

In verses 1-3, the Psalmist likened himself to the role of slaves who looked to their master waiting for them to show them what to say or do. In the

same way, he looked only to the Lord our God and waited for the Lord to be gracious and show mercy and repeated the idea three times to show the urgency of the situation because the enemy, arrogant and proud, showed nothing but hostility and the only One who could deliver them was the Lord our God. Trials do that. The matter is urgent. Intervention by the only one who could deliver is sought. Man's help is useless.



READ – A PSALM OF TRUST OR DEPENDENCE

Psalm 124 The Lord the Defense of His People

Once more the Lord has made all the difference to the situation. When it seemed that all was lost and the enemy too great, the Lord stepped in and delivered. He remembers the many times that the circumstances seemed impossible, yet the Lord brought about a great deliverance. We need to remember the many times the Lord has helped us in the past. Do not live in the past but allow it to build confidence in the Lord in the present.

Praise has returned for the Lord who has delivered them from traps set to catch them. The Lord had guided them before they were ensnared. We need to listen and not rush into any situation without first consulting the Lord. Our help is in the name or character of the Lord who made heaven and earth. He alone sees the danger ahead. He alone knows the traps set by others. We should always be thankful for answered prayer. When one is deeply grateful, he cannot cease to be thankful. The trouble is the depth of understanding as to how much the Lord has done for us. Only the Lord saves. The help of man is useless. Certain situations in life, like spiritual warfare, the only one who can gain the victory is the Lord God.

In verses 1-5, if the Lord had not been on our side, the victory of the enemy would have been complete. Praise be to the Lord for deliverance. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth.

Three references to the only God. All to bring about release and deliverance from those opposed and aimed at destruction. It's not the opposition who has left their mark but the Lord by His presence, His preventing of harm, His help from the attempt to enslave us.



READ – A TIME OF DELIVERANCE AND RESTORATION

Psalm 125 The Lord the Strength of His People

Through trusting the Lord, the one who felt so unworthy now realizes how strong he is in the Lord. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mt Zion which cannot be moved but abides forever. He has a sense of assurance, of confidence and strength. He makes a request to do good to those who are

good through His work in their lives but warning others that should they turn to their own way they will lose the blessing and goodness of the Lord.

Deep gratitude. God is able to limit the power of the enemy of our souls. God does not want us to resort to the old way of getting our own way. We are good, provided we obey the Lord. His request is that the Lord will do good to those He has made good. Those that turn to evil will be banished from His presence.



READ – A PSALM OF TRIAL OR DISTRESS

Psalm 126 A Joyful Return to Zion

The Psalmist is looking back when the Lord sent a bounteous harvest to the country and restored the fortunes or economy so that there was so much rejoicing that it was unreal. All in the past, he remembered how there was laughter and rejoicing and other nations realised what the Lord had done for His people in giving them an abundant harvest. They attributed that to the Lord giving them, rather than their efforts. The recipients agreed that the Lord had indeed blessed them and filled them with joy.

After a period of rejoicing this seems to hardly be a sound of distress. “Turn the captivity of Zion” could mean to restore the prosperity of Zion. The land was always in need of rain, the early rain and the later rain for the crops of wheat, grapes and olives. When the Lord acted in sending rain, we felt as though we were dreaming. Too good to be true. Our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. Others said in nations around us, “The Lord has done great things for them.” We said amen to that. The Lord has indeed done great things for us and we are glad.

In verse 4 he asks the Lord to do it again. All in the past but what of the present? Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. That would require abundant rain but at the moment the wadis are dry, and the harvest is non-existent. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. We all go through periods of dryness when nothing seems to happen and our walk with the Lord seems as though we are not growing spiritually. It requires hard work and perseverance and dependence on the Lord sending abundant rain. The Psalmist exercises faith in advance. Knowing how dependent on God they are, is causing them to trust God for the harvest.

This particular Psalm is true of personal evangelism. It requires taking the sharing of the good news of salvation very seriously. The seed is sown with tears because so many refuse to listen, that it results in discouragement. This is a promise from God that those who go out weeping carrying the seed of

salvation wherever they go, will return with joy bringing their sheaves with them. Your labour in the Lord will not be in vain. You work with the Lord. All that you accomplish is what He has done.

Some seed will be lost when people are not interested, others do not think it through and only respond for a while and others lose their way and there is nothing to show for the seed sown. This is not a casual sowing, but seed sown to bring about a harvest. The promise is only for those who are serious about sowing good seed. They will rejoice bringing their sheaves with them. What we have accomplished is what the Lord has done.

Daniel 12:3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever. There will be a harvest. The Kingdom of God will be full. Not one person will be missing whom God planned to be there.

So, this is a period of distress. A period of dryness of the spiritual walk with God. It is a call for renewal and restoration. A period of little fruit and lots of tears but a promise that should the Lord restore spiritual blessing, our mouths will once more be filled with laughter and rejoicing.

The Psalm started off with rejoicing but that was in the past. Now he is asking the Lord to do it again. Revival comes from the Lord. It is His plan that those who suffer now because they belong to Him, that their weeping will be replaced by joy and will rejoice when He returns.



READ – A PSALM OF TRUSTING OR DEPENDENCE

Psalm 127 Labouring and Prospering with the Lord

Time to rely on the Lord. Unless the Lord builds the house and guards the city, all activity that leaves out the Lord's involvement is doomed to failure. Marriages need the Lord. Society needs the Lord. Some work late at night and rise early in the morning because of anxious toil but the Lord gives to those that are His children, sleep and the very things they need while they are sleeping. So, we must not be like other people who leave Him out of their lives. We must seek His participation in all that we do and leave it to Him to provide the things we need while we sleep. When we sleep we appear to do nothing. God never sleeps but is working all the time.

Think of how many times God has worked while people slept.

- Adam got a wife.
- Abram a promise.
- Solomon wisdom and ability to reign well.
- In Mark the kingdom grows while the sower sleeps.

Luke 17:20 The kingdom of God does not grow by observation. Seek first the kingdom of God and all your needs of food, clothing, shelter, transport will be provided. Children are born as a gift from God. The result of the Lord building the house, being involved.

The Lord wants His people to enjoy life. He does not want them to be anxious about where they live or the society around them or to rise from sleeping with anxiety and go to bed anxious. He wants His children to trust Him about where they live and leave the details of how He provides for those he loves while they sleep. Just as the Lord Jesus taught that people should not live lives filled with anxiety, You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You. This sums up verses one and two.

Children are a heritage from the Lord. Not to be aborted but to allow the Lord to provide children so that He can teach the parents how He wants them to live. Our children are adopted. Just as we taught them, so do they teach us. We are blessed and so are they because we all belong to the Lord. They are children who have excelled. Many admire their outlook in life.



READ – A PSALM OF TRIUMPH OR DELIVERANCE

Psalm 128 Blessings of Those Who Fear the Lord

Another period of restoration and blessing. Nothing disturbs him and he can say with confidence “Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways.” What blessings? The blessing of the Lord upon your work. It will bear fruit. You will be happy in yourself. Your work will bring you satisfaction. Your wife, if the Lord had a say in the choice and is the fear of the home, will be like a fruitful vine. The vine is graceful, fruitful, gives shade over the house and courtyard, produces fruit and drink. Children like olive plants which are evergreen, full of vitality and produce new shoots around the old stem. Happy homes make a happy society. If God is feared and loved, there will be happiness in the home.

(This verse was fulfilled as a promise. My wife a vine, and the children olive plants. Vine and olive tree are unconnected but both from the Bible lands.)

The Lord bless you out of Zion. The Psalmist is seeking the blessing of others. They will grow to a ripe old age and see their grandchildren. When you have been blessed by the Lord Himself, you will want that blessing for others. No thought of spiritual drought and lack of fruit but instead much fruit in the home and a blessing from the Lord.

The Psalmist can only utter verse 1 because he has discovered what happens to those who live lives to please the Lord and seek to obey Him in detail.

They are blessed. His joy, peace and inner rest enables them to ride the waves of life. A promise of God when we fear the Lord and obey Him. You will eat the results of your labour as you play your part in working with Him. Blessings and prosperity will be yours. You no longer waste your time and your resources on those things that accomplish nothing other than consume time.

A fruit vine is often grown over a house and over a flat roofed house. This has two effects:

- The foliage provides shade, so the house is kept cool in summer.
- The vine provides bunches of grapes. The vine could grow in the open courtyard serving the same purpose.

Verses 2 and 3 in particular were given to me at university when I needed encouragement as, all my life I had known only failure until then. But what of you, the reader? You too will experience the blessing of the Lord as you respect and obey Him. You will one day eat the fruit of your labour; the Lord's blessing on your home and family.



READ – A PSALM OF RETURNING TRIALS AND DISTRESS

Psalm 129 Song of Victory over Zion's Enemies

Time to look back into the past and remember the many times the enemies of his people had caused them persecution and trouble. This was according to the Lord the direct result of the sin of the nation. Over and over the Lord had delivered them. The Psalmist had no concern for the enemies. Was it because he was going through such a time himself? Let them be put to shame. Let them act hastily and have nothing to show for their labour.

The Psalmist speaks as though he is the nation and is aware of how people have made life difficult for his people from establishment of his nation. He goes into detail as though the nation is a farm but whatever the enemy did, the Lord is righteous who knows all the facts. He has delivered his servant from the wicked. All the enemies of his people must be put to shame.

They will never know the blessing of the Lord. The psalmist is angry. Himself hostile and not the way to win the lost. The result of suffering and being treated badly.



READ – A PSALM OF TRUST AND DEPENDENCE

Psalm 130 Waiting for the Redemption of the Lord

How different this is to Psalm 129.

Was the Psalmist feeling that he was cut off from the Lord, as though the line of communication was broken? He cried out in anguish and did not

seem to make contact with the Lord. He was honest with the Lord and stated a fact in verse 3 that if the Lord took note or took account of his sin then no one could ever stand in His presence. To stand is to do so with confidence. He recognized there is forgiveness or cutting off with God. That God totally forgives.

The sinner casts himself upon the mercy of the Lord alone. God dealt with his sin and with ours at the Cross of Christ. The act of the sinless One is a timeless act covering the period prior to His death and after. So, the Psalmist has every right to be confident of God's mercy and waits with a sense of expectancy and anticipation for the Lord to "arrive" back in his life. He also hopes in His Word. He calls on his fellow citizens to also put their trust in the Lord who is merciful. Having experienced it himself, he wants it for others. The Lord is able not only to forgive but buy back and restore to Himself a people from all their sin. He is relying on the Lord and deals directly with Him. He is calling out of the depths. Of depression? The effect of finding life difficult. He is honest with God. It seems God has not been doing anything and so he is calling on God to act and be gracious to him. Aware he is a sinner but also aware that when God forgives, He forgets and does not have a list of sins to keep reminding us of our failures and God wants to forgive to restore His relationship with us.

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits for the Lord. He urges his nation to hope in the Lord who never ceases to love. With the Lord is complete redemption. He will pay the price for His chosen to belong to Him. Waiting means trusting and leaving it to the Lord to intervene. It seems that waiting is endless like a watchman waiting for the morning, but our part is to keep waiting for God's appointed time to act.

- **ABRAHAM WAITED 25 YEARS FOR A SON**

After 15 years of waiting for the promise, God visited Abraham again and assured him that the promise would be fulfilled in due time. It took another 10 years after the reassurance for Abraham and Sarah to give birth to a son who was named Isaac.

- **JOSEPH WAITED 13 YEARS TO BE RELEASED FROM PRISON**

Joseph waited over 13 years before his prophetic promise was fulfilled. The experience of Joseph was like that. God never told Joseph that he was going to become the second most powerful man in Egypt and save the entire region from famine. Joseph had no idea, while languishing in prison, that he was perfectly situated for God's amazing purpose in his life. He was

sold into slavery by his own brothers, and then he landed in prison because of a false accusation. For 13 years, things just went from bad to worse.

- **MOSES WAITED 40 YEARS TO SEE THE LAND PROMISED BY GOD**

Moses waited 40 years before he had his divine encounter with the flaming voice of God. Moses told the Israelites that they were not worthy to inherit the land and would wander the wilderness for 40 years until the generation who had refused to enter Canaan had died. It would be their children who would possess the land.

- **DAVID WAITED 15 YEARS TO BECOME KING**

David waited in his cave as an exile until he took the crown and the throne.

- **JESUS WAITED 30 YEARS BEFORE HE HEARD THE VOICE THAT COMMISSIONED HIM FOR HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY.**

If God is making us wait, we are in good company!

We are called to wait with Him to do what only He can do.



READ – A PSALM OF DELIVERANCE

Psalm 131 Simple Trust in the Lord

Having experienced forgiveness, restoration and concern for others to enjoy the salvation of the Lord, he tells Him that he is content with the Lord Himself. He remembers he is a sinner saved by grace and there was no place for pride or arrogance on his part and the things that were difficult for him to understand or mysterious that would feed his pride and make him think he knows everything, will not come between him and God. God Himself is a mystery. His ways and His thoughts. Finite man with his limitations should accept that the Bible is God's final word. Enough there to discover the facts necessary for our salvation and a relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When we try to be intellectual and wise, we head for troubled water. The need is to keep coming to God the Father as a child to learn what He has to teach. The Psalmist sees himself as a child with his mother. He is content just to be near the Lord. To enjoy God and discover that godliness with contentment is great gain. He longs that others will discover what he is experiencing.

Rest once more. A sense of contentment when he shares with the Lord that he is content with what the Lord has taught him. There are other matters, but he leaves the things that are too wonderful or beyond his understanding. I have decided to remember that I am only a child willing to listen and rest and enjoy Your company. The way he urges others is to put their hope or trust in the Lord.



READ – A PSALM OF TRIAL

Psalm 132 The Eternal Dwelling of God in Zion

A much longer Psalm. The Psalmist tells God to remember David who wanted to build a house for Him. It could be that that house had not been built and he calls on the Lord to see to it that the ark of the Lord finds its resting place when that house is built. He reminded the Lord of His promise to David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne and if they were obedient, then his throne would last forever. That did not happen until One who was of the line of David and fully obedient to God is today reigning on the throne of David as the King of the Jews.

How David valued the building of a house for the Lord above his own comfort. He has heard how people want to worship the Lord at His temple. *“His footstool”* a lowly place and instrument for the only God.

Arise O Lord to Your resting place. Is the Psalmist once more aware of lack of blessing because He does not seem to be present? He reminds the Lord of His promises to the line of David on the throne forever. Of course, that promise to David was only fulfilled when the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Was flogged, crucified and rose again to be able to say to a thief on a cross who asked Him to remember him when He came into His kingdom, **Today you will be with Me in paradise.** Jesus reigns.



READ – A PSALM OF TRUST

Psalm 133 Blessed Unity of the People of God

The result of the restored presence of the Lord is that there is peace and unity. This gives both pleasure to the Lord and His people. The oil refers to the holy perfumed oil used to anoint the high priest in **Exodus 30:24-25**. It was poured on Aaron’s head **Leviticus 8:12**. It is poured out abundantly and affected the whole body. It affects everyone. Mt Hermon *Jebel Sheikh*, *“the old man”* mountain like an old man with white hair because snow covered the peak for a long time of the year resulting in the melting snow producing that water that flows into the River Jordan. Water is life and blessing. For the first time *for evermore* is mentioned and again in **Daniel 12:2**.

The Lord commanded the mountains of Zion to be blessed because their eternal life became a reality through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How good it is if the people of God remain undivided like the snow on Mt Hermon, which never ceases going down on Mt Zion where the Lord showers His blessings on those who love and obey Him.



READ – A PSALM OF PRAISE AND REJOICING

Psalm 134 Praising the Lord in His House at Night

Praising and rejoicing by those who serve the Lord in His house.

The Psalmist is full of praise for the Lord and encourages all the servants of the Lord to praise and bring pleasure to the Lord who cannot be confined by a house as He fills heaven and earth. There is a place where the servants of the Lord are to gather and worship Him. The goal of his pilgrimage was to rejoice with others from all over the world. His experience was up and down, sorrow and rejoicing, distress and restoration, yet it ended with praise and thanksgiving. How long the journey took, we do not know. With each one of us it takes a lifetime. We know the problems of life are not solved overnight.

Is this not your experience? Trials and problems happen in all our lives. They drive us to the Lord who alone delivers. The Lord restores the joy of His salvation. The joy of the Lord is your strength. God completes the work He has begun in each of us on a One-on-one relationship. This is the method God uses. Trials drive us to depend only on Him. This causes us to rejoice before the next problem, time to trust and then rejoice.

God is at work. He will bring to completion what He originated in us. We are His workmanship. It is a work of grace throughout and that not of ourselves, that no one should boast. We will all one day exclaim: “I am what I am by the grace of God.” **Isaiah 26:12 You owe us nothing O Lord for You have accomplished all Your work in and through us.**

Death is not the end product. God will complete His work in us at the final day of resurrection when we will all have resurrected bodies and will be like Jesus, for we will see Him as He is. Until then we must say “You are the potter, I am the clay. You know what is best. Your time is always according to your appointed time to work.” Our part is to work out our salvation with fear and self-mistrust for God is at work. No purpose of His can be thwarted.

Lift up your hands and praise Him. May the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth bless you from Zion. Jesus said the time has come for people anywhere and everywhere to worship God in spirit and truth. The place is no longer important, but the manner of worship remains important.

DISCARDED

A tin of food that has passed its “best by” date is discarded.

Discarded also are old Rand notes because they are no longer used; they are old and worthless.

Older people in our church who have much experience are no longer used. They feel discarded. It is time for younger people to take over, yet the Bible teaches that God uses the things that man despises or discards. God uses older people in other ways.

1. God uses what man discards

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:27 God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

God delights in choosing to use anyone who responds to His call and is willing to discard everything. Yes everything. Relying on worldly wisdom and cleverness.

Today we discard the foolish, weak, lowly, despised things, but not God.

Why is God so different to man? Why does He use what we discard? The answer is so that no one may boast before Him.

In view of this the apostle Paul was determined that his message was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The person of Jesus both divine and human, sinless in a hostile environment. God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The apostle Paul sensed his weakness and total dependence on God. He made sure that his message was usable by the Holy Spirit and not as a result of his cleverness. He knew that only if the Holy Spirit gave him the approach, method and content would souls get saved. God’s word would not be fruitless.

The results: souls saved, churches established all to the glory of God alone. Paul said he sowed, Apollos watered but God gave the increase. He saw his readers as God's field and God's building. The same applies today. Not methods, clever ideas but trusting God to use the things man despises to reap a harvest.

2. Jesus was discarded by His own people

John 1:11-13 Jesus came to His own people, but they did not receive Him. 12 But to all those who received Him who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God 13 who were not born of natural descent, nor human decision nor of a husband's will but born of God.

To receive anyone in the Bible lands is to make them feel at home and give them the right to claim anything to meet their needs. It is not just to say "Come in." It means, "All that I have is Yours".

They did not welcome Jesus because He did not fit in with their plans. They rejected Him as their Messiah even though He fulfilled 48 major Messianic prophecies. They crucified Him because He claimed to be the Son of God. This fitted in with God's plans.

Psalms 118:22 The stone that the builders discarded has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes. The Lord has done it this very day. Let us rejoice today and be glad. Jesus quoted that verse and applied it to Himself before His death on the Cross.

This is the only way that God planned to bring about your salvation. Jesus had to take your place, your sin and your punishment. There is no other way.

Acts 4:10-12 Peter declared: Jesus Christ whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. 11 Jesus is the stone you builders rejected which has become the cornerstone. 12 Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

God has chosen this way because Salvation is all His doing. God has said, "My glory I will not share with another."

Today people are still discarding Jesus. They leave Him out of their lives. That is why He has not returned because He does not want anyone to be lost. Up until now, have you discarded Jesus as not being important in your life? If you died tonight where would you spend eternity? Millions will go to hell because they discard Jesus. Millions will spend eternity with Jesus because they valued Him above anything else.

1 John 5:11-12 This is the record that God has given us eternal life. 12 He that has the Son has life and he that does not have the Son of God does not have life. Born in a Christian home, going to church, living a good life, giving money to charity – none of this will get you into heaven. The only way is to know God personally and Jesus Christ who is sent by God. Just you and Jesus. It is a One-on-one. Jesus said **I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me.** Have you taken that step? You could do it today. Use the following prayer:

Lord Jesus, up to now I have discarded You and left You out of my life. Thank You that You died on the Cross for me. Thank You that You took my punishment for my sin, that You were buried and rose from the dead. I ask You to come into my life and direct me in the way I should live. Help me to share what You have done for me with others. Amen.

Previously you discarded Jesus but now you are required to discard everything to gain Jesus.

Luke 14:33 Those of you who do not give up or discard everything cannot be My disciple. There can be nothing that has a hold on you; your family, your property, your own ambition. Nothing must stop you doing God's will.

The apostle Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. I live yet not I but Christ lives in me. The life that I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

What does this mean? Paul's way of life until he met Jesus was discarded. He realised that when Jesus died, he died. Everything that he once valued; he has discarded as rubbish.

Ask Him how He can use you in this stage of your life.

LESSONS FROM THE SERVANT

Songs in Isaiah

The Lord delivered His people from Egypt with a mighty arm. The Arm of the Lord who is invisible at first.

Psalm 98:1 His right hand and His mighty arm has achieved for Him the victory.

Isaiah 51:5 My arm shall judge the people ... and on My arm shall they trust.

And then the Arm of the Lord is revealed and we discover that the Arm of the Lord is a person:

Isaiah 62:8 The Lord has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength...

Isaiah 59:15-16 So truth fails, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. 16 He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.

There was no other that could bring about our salvation. The Arm of the Lord is the same as the Servant of the Lord in .



READ

Isaiah 42:1-3 The Servant of the Lord

v1 **Behold** means “see and listen with full attention”. This is the same word that Jesus used in **Revelation 3:20**. It is Me; listen to Me. My servant is nameless and one that I uphold or grip tightly, which shows there is a close relationship. My elect one, My chosen one who gives Me a great deal of pleasure. Adam, before he sinned, was described as very good but the Servant of the Lord *delights* the Lord.

My Spirit is upon Him which means that the presence of the Lord was in Him with power. Through the person and work of the Servant of the Lord, the same applies to the redeemed who are chosen. Have a close relationship with God and the Holy Spirit of God lives in them. How does the Servant of the Lord operate? He does not make a noise; he does not draw attention to himself but will move around quietly. He will not impose Himself but will wait to be invited. He will be gentle in His manner and those who want to know the truth will find Him whispering the truth.

v3 No one will be rejected by Him. A bruised reed used by a shepherd as a flute is tended carefully so that it can be played again, and a smoking flax will be cleaned up so that it will burn brightly. No one is despised and rejected but is restored to usefulness.

This applies to anyone. No one is beyond His ability to change. We are all damaged goods through us going our own way and living in a world that ignores and rejects God. We all become discouraged and lose our usefulness at some stage in our lives but not the Servant of the Lord. He will persevere. He will not give up under the same conditions that people will normally give up. He will continue until He has accomplished His purpose for coming.

The Servant of the Lord is a person just like us. A baby like us, given the ability to reach deep into the hearts of people and bring them under conviction. Some will readily follow when called. Hidden in the shadow of the hand of God until at the appointed time He will start His ministry. His work will be effective like a polished arrow. It will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent. Israel failed but not the Servant of the Lord in whom I will be glorified.



READ

Isaiah 49:1-4 The Servant, the Light to the Gentiles

The Lord Jesus said to the disciples “Are you so dull?” “Have I been with you so long and you do not know Me?” “Will you also leave?” After spending three years teaching and living a sinless life with the 12 disciples, one betrayed Him, one denied Him publicly, then fled and hid away. From a human point of view, the Cross was a failure. *Failure is not a person but an apparent event.* His apparent failure is our Salvation. Do we not all go through periods of spiritual darkness? Do we not envy the wicked who prosper without God? The Servant of the Lord was like us but left us an example. He left the evaluation to God.

Was the Cross of Jesus a failure? The resurrection was proof that it was mission accomplished. Jesus was in all points tempted as we are but in His case without sin, but in **Isaiah 53** He would look back over His life and suffering and say it was well worth it to accomplish our salvation. Proof of the results of His work is that the Gentiles will be incorporated into the people and family of God.

The Servant of the Lord was given the tongue of the learned to enable Him to speak a word in season to him who is tired because of life’s knocks.



READ

Isaiah 50 The Servant, Israel's Hope

The Lord has opened my ear and I was not like the rest of mankind, I did not go my own way but did all that I was told to do. Jesus said that He asked His Father what to say and how to say it. Sometimes God has to wake us up in the night because He needs our attention and we need to listen to Him. We are often so busy during the day and if we make time, we do all the talking. The Lord got His attention and He responded to pass on a word in season. A word that is just right for every person that comes to Him. There is a word from God just for you as if you are the only person in the world. A One-on-one with you. A fresh word for today. Not yesterday's word. Old truths made alive by the Spirit of God and applied to meet a need, your need. A word that is relevant and fresh.

As it was for the Servant of the Lord so it is for us. When God wakes you up, respond like Samuel. "Speak, Your servant is listening." He left out "Lord," but you need not. When God instructs, listen and carry it out. If it is contrary to your will then ask the Lord to help you to be willing to be made willing by Him.

- v5 I listened and obeyed. I was told there would be suffering. I accepted that and allowed others to afflict Me.
- v7 I never stopped depending on the Lord and would not be put to shame. and remained determined to carry out in detail what He required me to do.
- v9 The opposition to His ministry will disappear because their lives are short-lived, but the Lord is eternal who will help Him. Be like the Servant of the Lord. Do what God tells you to do.
- v10 Why this promise? A time will come when God will wake you up to instruct you and bring light into your soul and light for others.

Time to be a blessing to others but the credit is the Lord's alone.



READ

Isaiah 53 The Sin-Bearing Messiah

- v1-3 A major change has taken place. The first three verses were only human observation which is then followed by divine revelation.

The Arm of the Lord: A person. My own arm, the arm of the Lord yet carries out the work of the Lord. He appears to have an undistinguished origin like a root out of dry ground.

How then can He be the Servant of the Lord? He looked the same as his brothers, no taller, no more handsome. He grew up as normal. He was a baby boy, became a teenager and then a mature man and was known as the carpenter's son who became a carpenter Himself. He was not popular in His hometown. They tried to kill Him. He had few adherents. How then could He be the Servant of the Lord?

v4-6 This is divine revelation by the Holy Spirit. He suffered not for His own sin but for ours. He was punished for our sin, not His. He did not deserve suffering but took on ours.

All scripture is the result of the Holy Spirit's inspiration. We need the Holy Spirit to reveal the Word of God, but He only does so if we come as little children admitting that we need Him to teach us the truth with fresh insights.

Matthew 11:25-27 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. 26 Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight. 27 All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.

He makes the Word of God practical in our daily walk. We fail to understand just through our intellect which touches our head but not our heart and spirit.

Conclusion: The four songs of the Servant of the Lord reveal His unique person and work. He is not only our Saviour but our example in evangelism, helping others, dealing with discouragement, opposition and suffering and we need the Spirit of God to understand the Arm of the Lord/Servant of the Lord's work. We need to apply what we hear. It requires us to be willing, resulting in a conscious course of action. Not to give up but to do what we have been given to do.

We must be willing to learn:

- how to share our faith,
- how to listen to God,
- how to leave the results of our life to God,
- how to handle opposition and suffering, and
- willing to ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand what we read.

THE PRIEST WHO BECAME A PROPHET

Ezekiel

Ezekiel was in exile in Babylon. The son of a priest, he had lost his vocation because of the sin of the nation. However, he saw a vision of God which changed him.



READ

Ezekiel 1 Ezekiel's Vision of God

He saw a mysterious, intricate and awesome revelation of God. Brightness like amber, faces of four living creatures, faces of a lion, an ox, an eagle and a man, each lord of their domain. They never turned.

He saw wheels within wheels. Mobility. God is always active and on the move. All aspects of heaven moved in unison. Wherever the Spirit wanted to go, the creatures went, and the wheels went because the Spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. Their wings produced a noise like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty. He saw a throne and on this blue throne he saw one with the likeness of the appearance of a man sitting on the throne. Above His waist the colour of amber and below His waist the colour of fire with the appearance of a rainbow all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.



READ

Ezekiel 2 Ezekiel Called to Be a Prophet

Ezekiel's reaction was to fall on his face in awe and fear. Face down, the Lord could not talk to him, so he was told to stand up. Then the Spirit entered Ezekiel and enabled him to stand and he heard God.

Ezekiel needed to realise that the Lord was the only God who operated throughout all of His creation. He was God in Chebar, far from the promised land and destroyed temple. He was still active. His appearance was like that of a man who is created in the image of God. God is invisible yet He has form. Jesus told the people that they had neither heard the voice nor seen the form of the Father. He has form and we might discover that He has an appearance like that of His creatures created in His image.



READ

Ezekiel 3 The Responsibility of the Prophet

Ezekiel is told he is to go to a people who are stubborn and rebellious. He is sent so that they will be without excuse as they will know that a prophet from God had been with them. Ezekiel himself was to receive the Word of

God like food and allow it to become part of his life. He was told to eat it. Unlike most scrolls, it was written on both sides so that it would be entirely the Word of God without any additions on his part. He was told to fill his stomach. He was told like Jeremiah not to be afraid of the faces of the people.

Ezekiel is himself made a watchman for his people and God warned him to pass on the message or face the consequences. In **Ezekiel 33**, a watchman is made from the people. This time it is not Ezekiel but there is a general principle with God of passing on His warnings. The people of the land take a man and make him their watchman. If he blew the trumpet and warned the people, then their response would determine whether they were saved or not. If the watchman failed to warn the people, he would be held responsible.



READ

Ezekiel 4 The Siege of Jerusalem Portrayed

Ezekiel went to the exiles and sat silently with them for seven days which was a period set for mourning. Ezekiel was called by God to be a watchman but if he failed to warn the people then he would have to give an account. If he warned the wicked and there was no response, then he would not be held responsible. The same would apply to a righteous man who turns away from the Lord. If Ezekiel did not warn him, that righteous man would die in his sin, but Ezekiel would have to answer for keeping quiet.

Far too many of the Lord's servants keep quiet and never speak about their Saviour. One day those who served them in banks, shops, garages will be asked why they never submitted their lives to Jesus. They will offer the excuse that no one warned them. Then Jesus will turn to you and ask why you never said anything or gave no literature to the lost around you.

The hand of the Lord was upon Ezekiel and told him to go out into the plain to hear the Lord. There he saw the glory of the Lord again and once more fell on his face. Once more the Spirit enabled him to stand and told him to stay at home. He is warned that his movements would be restricted by the people and that there would be times that the Spirit would not allow him to speak but when the Spirit opened his mouth and gave him liberty then he was to speak *"Thus says the Lord."* There are times when the Lord does not want us to speak and our spirit must be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel was told to do strange things to get the attention of the people. He was to get a clay tablet and set up a siege against it, with a siege wall, battering ram and tents. He was to lie on his left side for 390 days for the sins of Israel and on his right side for 40 days for the sins of Judah.

He had to have a starvation diet as though in a siege with restricted intake of water. Ezekiel protested about using human waste for fuel so was allowed to use cow dung.

So Ezekiel was to be obedient in his diet.



READ

Ezekiel 5 A Sword Against Jerusalem

Then he was told to shave over his head and beard which he probably esteemed and to burn a third, strike a third with the sword and scatter a third in the wind. A few hairs to be bound in his garment. For the sake of conveying the message of God, Ezekiel was to submit his appearance to God.

After acting out a scene in front of the people, Ezekiel then preached the message. He did not rely on the drama itself. He also dealt with a false proverb in **Ezekiel 18:2 The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.** God says that the soul that sins shall die for his own sins and not be held responsible for others.

God will use different methods of reaching the lost and making His Word known in every period of time. We must not restrict Him by past methods and experiences.

Unlike the other prophets Ezekiel was held in high esteem. The people spoke about him with pleasure. They liked the way he sang and played a musical instrument and they believed he brought the Word of God, but they did not do what he said. He sat with the elders so was respected.



READ

Ezekiel 8 Abominations in the Temple

He saw the glory of the pre-incarnate Christ. Everyone in the city who felt the same as God about the evil in the city had a mark placed on his forehead. There were very few. The rest were slaughtered as God ignored the plea of Ezekiel for mercy.



READ

Ezekiel 18 A False Proverb Refuted

Turning away is the most important act in anyone's life. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that he should turn away from it and live.



READ

Ezekiel 33 The Watchman and His Message

Ezekiel is warned at the beginning of his ministry and again towards the end in **Ezekiel 33:7**.

Why repeat the almost same message? Over the period of time we tend to compromise, change and become more "broadminded" but not so God. He does not change. **Malachi 3:6 For I am the Lord, I change not.** His message and standard stays the same.

God warns that He does not take the average of a man's life nor does He take into account the past. For a sinner who turns to the Lord, his past will not be held against him. A righteous man who trusts in his righteousness and turns away from the Lord will die in his sin. His past will not do him any good. God asks the question: Where are you now? A decision in the past in your youth to follow Christ is meaningless unless you persevered which is a sign that a real work of God was done.

No one can rest on his laurels, nor must he keep a record of what he has done, nor rely on past obedience. What is required is obedience on a daily basis.

Nothing of the past will be remembered if the person turns away whether it be righteousness or evil. Elijah did nothing for three and a half years, but he was obedient.

Ezekiel found that God was not restricted in using him even though the temple no longer existed. He learned that there are times when God wanted him to keep quiet and other times when he was given liberty to speak. Like Paul the apostle he must have had a pressure within "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel."

GOD USES NOBODIES

Amos

Amos is a Hebrew word meaning to carry a burden. Amos conveys the judgement of God to the ten northern tribes. He was a shepherd and he also tended sycamore fig trees in Tekoa. He later made it clear he had no connection with those who made a living out of preaching nor had he any training in theology.

The Lord called a man into His service who lived long hours of silence cut off from people. When the Lord called him and gave Him a message to pass on, one would wonder how to reach ten tribes with the same message. Today we preach or teach in halls and churches where large numbers can gather. In the time of Amos, the people loved to go on a pilgrimage to various holy shrines. These were at Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba where their patriarchs had experiences with God and therefore, they thought they could get the same blessings there. Just as today, people visit the “holy” sites of Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem thinking that to go where Jesus was would somehow rub off on them.

At those shrines, there would be local prophets who would receive an income by speaking to the pilgrims.



READ

Amos 1 Judgments on Israel's Neighbours

As the people came from all over Israel to the shrines, the message they heard could then be conveyed to their families and areas. To these shrines Amos went and passed on the Word of the Lord. He clearly prepared what had to be said and, to capture the ears of his audience, he first passed on the judgement of God upon the behaviour of neighbouring states before dealing with his audience.



READ

Amos 2 Judgment on Israel

For three transgressions and for four is repeated over and over and it shows that God is slow to exercise His anger and gives time for a people to change.

- Damascus would be punished for cruelty.
- Gaza for making slaves of a whole community including women and children and thus showing no compassion.
- Ammon to be punished for cruelty in killing the weak and helpless, pregnant mothers.

- Tyre for breaking a promise to a neighbour and selling them to Edom who would be punished because of its hatred of the descendants of Israel and not showing pity.
- Moab for such unending hatred as to even burn the bones of the king of Edom.

Having revealed why their neighbours would be punished, Amos would have clearly captured the attention of the pilgrims at the shrines. He then tells them why they too would be punished.

Judah, their relatives in the south, had rejected the law of the Lord and instead lived a lie, as did their fathers.

Israel also showed no pity but made a small debt (a pair of sandals) the reason for enslaving someone. They rode roughshod over the poor in the land and both father and son had sex with the same woman. Each one followed his own god.

God reveals through His servant the seriousness in His sight of how we treat people. Of showing no pity, breaking promises, treatment of the helpless (unborn babies) and lasting hatred. We must learn to forgive and forget.

The nations have the witness of their conscience and they would be judged accordingly. However, the greater condemnation is reserved for those who have received a revelation of the will of God and ignore it. In the case of Judah and Israel, they had the law and the prophets sent by God but chose to go their own way. The Lord reminded the people that He had destroyed the Amorite in the land. He had delivered them from Egypt and brought them through the wilderness. He had raised up some of their sons to be prophets, but they had tried to make the prophets like themselves and told them not to prophesy. So, Israel's condemnation would be the greatest because they had openly rejected the Word of God.

Instead of bringing pleasure to the Lord, the people made Him heavy of heart. The young men would not be delivered by their vitality. The strong would find their strength useless. The mighty would not be able to deliver himself. All three have natural ability but it will not help them on the day the nation is punished.



READ

Amos 3 Authority of the Prophet's Message

Amos was now able to pass on a more personal message to the people from the Lord. He reminded them that the Lord had brought them from Egypt. Of all people they only were known to the Lord by their

experiences. **Deuteronomy 7:7-8 He had set His love upon them because He loved them.** Therefore, they would be punished for their moral depravity.

The Lord first reveals His secret in close fellowship to His servants the prophets. Then the prophet passes on the message to the people. The Lord has spoken who can but prophesy! In other words, the prophet received his message from God alone and then he could not keep quiet, he had to pass it on.

The reason many people today have nothing to say is because they fail to listen to God and wait for His Word to sink into their hearts and radically change their lives. Once that happens, they will not be able to keep quiet.

As a shepherd, Amos knew that if he had to prove the loss of a sheep, he would have to show at least two legs or the piece of an ear so the evidence that Samaria would leave behind would be the edge of a bed or couch. Items of ease and luxury. As well as the houses of ivory and mansions.

The shrine at Bethel would be destroyed. The winter house and the summer house would be destroyed. Two houses would be destroyed, together with the houses of ivory and the great houses, they will all come to an end.



READ

Amos 4 God's Punishments Have Not Reformed Israel

The religion at the shrines was condemned. God is not interested in religion but desires a close relationship based on what He has already done and seeks to do for those who trust Him.

Why Bethel? God revealed Himself for the first time to Jacob at Bethel. He promised to be with him as he left his family and bring him back to the land. He promised to bless Jacob who, by an act of his will, decided that the Lord would be His God and he would give Him a tithe of all he had.

So, Bethel became a shrine to the people of Israel; that it was a place to meet God. Yet the temple of the Lord was in Jerusalem. To avoid going to Judah they made Bethel their pilgrimage destination. Amos told them to come to Bethel and transgress, that is break the law in rebellion and do the same at Gilgal (meaning "rolling").

Why Gilgal? It was there that the people were circumcised after crossing the River Jordan and God told Joshua that He had rolled away the reproach of Egypt. They also kept the Passover there. So, it was a place to make sure that you had inherited the promises of God. However, Amos said that all they would do there is add to their sins of rebellion.

These people loved their religion. They brought their sacrifices every morning. Business was good because they had to buy the animals for slaughter and pay the priests for performing a service for them. It made them feel as though God owed them for what they did. They brought their tithes every three years. They did not do this quietly. They announced it to all. They offered a sacrifice with leaven. This was their own doing and not according to what was prescribed by the Law. They proclaimed and told everyone what they were doing. Imagine them shouting, “I gave a thousand.” “I gave two thousand!” The Lord says, “For this you love, you children of Israel.” All over the world people love religion because it makes them feel good, as though by their efforts, they expect God to treat them well out of “gratitude” to them.

What was God’s response? It can be found in [Amos 4:6-13](#). The people were satisfied with their religion, but God responded by giving them a **famine** and lack of bread in their cities. He did so that they might return to Him. Not become religious but submit themselves to His will and His Law.

v7 God also **withheld rain** with three months to go before the harvest, so the rains that should have fallen in Spring, never came. God sent rain in one area but not another. We would attribute that to the whims of nature, but God said that it was His doing. God said that the shortage of water drove the population to where there was water, but it was insufficient. Even that did not cause the people to return to God.

v9 Then God sent **disease** to harm their gardens while their vines, olive and fig trees were consumed by locusts, yet still they refused to return to God. Agriculture was the basis of the economy and it was economic and financial disaster where it hurt most, but still no return to the Lord.

v10 Then God tried to use a **plague** or disease as He used in Egypt in dealing with Pharaoh.

He sent **war** resulting in the death of their young men who would have looked after them in their old age. Even that produced no change of heart.

God sent a **natural disaster** such as an earthquake but with no effect.

What more could God do?

His only option was to intervene Himself and deal personally with them. He told them to **prepare themselves to meet Him**. He is the Creator and knows everything about man and is able to turn everything upside down.



READ

Amos 5 A Lament for Israel

By the time the Lord had finished dealing with that nation, only ten percent remained. However even then God urged the people to see Him and live; not to become religious by going to Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba.

Why Beersheba? Beersheba was the place where Jacob worshipped God prior to going to Egypt with his family. God assured him there of His presence and that He would make Him a great nation. Beersheba was a shrine to make sure that God will go with you and multiply your family. But God said that going to all three shrines was a waste of time. To get to Beersheba the people would bypass Jerusalem and God's people of Judah.

Gilgal, God said, would cease to exist and the same would apply to Bethel. Both would be forgotten. Once more God says, "Seek the Lord and come alive." Your behaviour is such that you do not treat people justly. God can do all things and totally cause the unexpected to happen. He can cause water from the sea by evaporation to condense and fall on the land causing the people to prosper. However, in both cases He can do the opposite by turning darkness into night and bring ruin upon the strong.

God is aware of how their society behaves. They do not like criticism of their actions nor those who seek to please God. The poor have a hard time whereas the rich build their houses of hewn sandstone. Their houses would be left empty and they would not enjoy the produce of their vineyards. God says that He knew all about their sin. Those who are wise keep quiet because the days are evil. Seek good and live, for then you will know the presence of God in blessing. Even now before it is too late. Hate evil and love good that God may look upon you with grace and favour.

"When I pass through you," God said that would be a time of great sorrow. There would be no escape like fleeing from a lion and meeting a bear. God said that He hated religion. He hated their feast days and gathering together. Their burnt offerings were unacceptable to Him as were their peace offerings. He could not bear to hear their singing. Rather let them act justly and according to that which was in line with His will.



READ

Amos 6 Warnings to Zion and Samaria

To be pitied were those who were at ease in Judah and Samaria, who thought they had been blessed by God. They were no better than those in Hamath, on the Orontes River in Syria or Gath in the area of Gaza. To be

pitied were those that tried to forget about the day of judgement. You indulge in luxurious living, sleep well, eat well, spend your time doing nothing except kill time because you have nothing better to do.

You drink the best wine and use the costliest ointment to retain your youth, you will be the first to be punished. God said that He hated the pride of the people and their mansions. Yet the name of the Lord was not mentioned. Why are the people proud? Because of some minor victory. They face a nation that would cause what they did to be viewed as trivial.

Has anything changed in the new millennium? Mankind is pre-occupied with material prosperity. The emphasis is on one's appearance and never ageing or showing grey hairs. There is a preoccupation with the pleasures of sport and that which exalts man's achievements.



READ

Amos 7 Vision of the Locusts

The Lord revealed His Word to Amos in close fellowship. He would send locusts who would strip the land, resulting in greater economic disaster. Amos prayed and interceded for the people and asked the Lord to see them not as they see themselves in their pride but as He sees them as small and insignificant. The Lord said to Amos that it would not happen. The Lord did not change His mind but rather took Amos into His confidence so that Amos would intercede and ask the Lord to forgive, delivering them from the punishment they deserved.

Then Amos saw a great fire which was no natural fire but would consume even the lakes. Once more Amos interceded and asked the Lord to stop for the same reason. He saw the people from God's point of view. The Lord said once more it would not be.

Then Amos saw a plumb line which would be a dividing line through the nation. The Lord would no longer be present in their lives but instead their shrines and the monarchy would be removed. This time he did not pray. Sin must be punished.

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, conveyed a false picture of the prophet Amos and his message. He told the king that Amos had plotted against the king by saying he would die by the sword, whereas Amos had only said the royal house would be attacked and go into exile. Nothing new today. Reporters still take statements out of context to create publicity. Amaziah spoke to Amos directly calling him a seer and not a prophet. A seer would get his message through dreams, but a prophet would be spoken to by God.

He told Amos to return to the land of Judah and there, prophesy but not again at Bethel because it was there that the king had his court. Amaziah was probably the priest of the king and received his income from the services he performed. Possibly Amos was reducing his income.

Amos replied by giving his personal testimony. He was a nobody. He never sought to be a prophet nor was he related to a prophet or went to a school of the prophets. He had bred sheep and looked after fig trees. The Lord had taken him from behind as he followed the sheep. Without warning and totally unexpected. Told to prophesy to the people of Israel by leaving his area, family and work and to go to another area without any indication of income or the meeting of his needs. He spoke to Amaziah who was ordering him not to proclaim the Word of God nor to gently convey his message like the dripping of a tap. (The method of a prophet was not to threaten or shout but gently convey what the message of the Lord was.)

Amos brought gently a terrible message for Amaziah. He would lose his everything: his wife, his family, his nation and he would die in exile.



READ

Amos 8 Vision of the Summer Fruit

Why did the Lord God show Amos a basket of summer fruit? Was it an indication of a harvest? But the harvest Israel would endure was one where the Lord would no longer pass in blessing through them, where songs would turn to wailing because of their attitude to the needy and the poor.

Those who lack nothing, think only of future business opportunities. Dishonesty in business and to take advantage of the poor is also noted by the Lord. Their rejoicing would turn to sorrow and one day they would realise that they no longer heard the words of the Lord through His prophets. Though He had sent many prophets, they were ignored. Amos was probably respected by the people who enjoyed what he had to say, and they then told their families and towns on their return from the shrines.

God predicted an awful future for the majority of the people. Wherever they went God would be doing them harm, yet there would be restoration for a remnant. There would be prosperity, but it will be a work of grace.

Amaziah disappeared from the scene and is forgotten because he opposed the Word of God, but Amos is remembered. He was unable to dissuade the people from going their own way, but they were without excuse. No one could say that they did not know or were not warned.

THE FIRST TO SLEEP ON A FOAM BLUBBER MATTRESS

Jonah



READ

Jonah 1 Jonah's disobedience

Not many people record their failures as well as Jonah did. He did not hide or cover up his reactions that showed him in a poor light but revealed the heart and outlook of God.

Early on in life he experienced that God was a gracious and merciful God, slow to exercise anger and abundant in loving kindness and who does not want to harm people.

Jonah knew that the reason God called him of all people was that he had experienced mercy and forgiveness and knew God personally. He knew too that God wanted the people of Nineveh to change so that He could forgive them. However, Jonah knew that the Assyrians had used cruelty to sow terror in the hearts of those in surrounding nations as Nineveh had no barrier, like Egypt had the desert or Tyre which had the sea. Jonah only wanted Nineveh to be destroyed. He was a man who knew that the Lord, the only God, had the power to change lives and was sending him to be the means of changing the direction of a nation. He did not want to be a success in this project. He thought that grace should only be his experience and not that of a cruel Gentile nation.

Jonah acted hastily. He did not think it through. Those who wait for the Lord will not act hastily or be put to shame. He fled immediately when he got the call by God. He should have praised God for being given the privilege of conveying the message of God. It is an honour to be called by God who often uses people that no one would ever consider as good material. That Jonah acted hastily indicated he was not where he should have been spiritually. He did not stop to think that what he was doing was very foolish. He was trying to run away from the God of heaven and his only thought was to go in the opposite direction. He was acting as though God was just a local deity and would not stop him. Who would use a servant who went his own way and rejected the call of God? Jonah forgot the One-on-one with God that never ceases. Others can do as they like but those in a One-on-one with God cannot, as He will not allow them to.

He went to Joppa and found a ship ready to sail for Tarshish, which was on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea. He had the money to pay the

fare. Everything was working out as he planned so it must be the right thing for him to do. Sleep and enjoy the voyage and let the Lord call someone else. Was he asked the reason for his trip? Did he reply that he was leaving the God of his country who made the sea and dry land? He went to his berth and fell asleep after the long walk and a period in which he did not want to think about his actions. He kept blotting out of his mind the call of God.

But the Lord sent a wind that created a storm that threatened the safety of the ship. Every sailor cried out to his god, all the while Jonah kept on sleeping. The captain rebuked him for sleeping and told him to pray to his God for deliverance. There is no mention of Jonah praying. Lots were cast and it fell on Jonah. The Lord was even in that. They asked him many questions, but He made no mention of his occupation. Was he unskilled? We do not know but he replied to their other questions. He could not explain why he, who feared the Lord, should attempt to flee from Him. When we go out of the will of God we act foolishly.

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

The sailors were shocked by his rejecting what his God wanted him to do. He could not explain or defend his actions. How often when we are out of the will of God that we have nothing to say? No good news to pass on, no awareness of the needs of others. A silent witness!

Jonah knew that the storm was not intended to be the end of him but was to change his direction. God knows how to get His way. He is in control. Jonah knew that somehow the Lord would make it possible to return him to the point of obedience, so he told the sailors that they had to throw him overboard if they were to experience a calm sea. Jonah not only knew the Lord to be a merciful God but now he discovered that God can do anything to prevent His purpose from being thwarted. Telling them what to do with him was, for the sailors, the extreme penalty for disobedience on Jonah's part. It meant certain death for Jonah. God cannot use us unless we are willing to die to our own agenda.

The sailors valued life and refused at first to carry out Jonah's wish but were forced to do so. They pleaded for forgiveness for their act and when the sea calmed down after the disappearance of Jonah, they discovered that the Lord alone was God. God can use us even when we are not where we should be.



READ

Jonah 2 Jonah's Prayer and God's Answer

Jonah prayed very quickly because he was not a swimmer and sank like a stone to the bottom. It was an experience he would never forget but the Lord had already prepared a way of deliverance before he prayed, and he was swallowed by a large fish. God often anticipates the need. In our case, God provided a house for our daughter before He called her to serve Him. The timing was the miracle. So often the Lord uses ordinary things in life to deliver and provide for His servants, but the timing is the miracle.

Jonah recorded a long-planned prayer in Jonah 2. When he came to write down his experience, he was able to compose his prayer in an orderly manner. He remembered crying out to the Lord in his distress and how God acted promptly.

No delays were possible. He felt he was close to death, but the Lord heard him. He remembered going down, down, down until it seemed rescue would be impossible, yet the Lord brought him up, up, up which only the Lord his God could do.

If anyone ever thought of a more impossible situation to be in and to be rescued, let them compare their circumstances with that of Jonah. On the foam blubber mattress, Jonah, at his weakest, remembered the Lord and he prayed to the Lord who was present there with him and in His temple. He realized that those who cling to worthless idols, like the ever-present idol of self-will, would lose the grace and help of God that could be theirs. He could insist on his own way and reject the will of God and lose all that God wanted to do in him and for him. He would lose the One-on-one relationship he had with the Lord.

Jonah offered praise to God in advance and promised to pay what he had vowed to the Lord. Whatever we promise the Lord we must carry out. Had he one day said to God after experiencing salvation, that he would do anything for God? God then told him to go to Nineveh. A note of confidence in the Lord for complete restoration. *"Salvation is of the Lord."* Only the Lord God can save like this!

Only then did the Lord cause the fish to spit out the indigestible Jew on to dry ground. Jonah was thus preserved from drowning and returned to his starting point.



READ

Jonah 3 Jonah Preaches at Nineveh

It is a blessing to be called a second time. In Jonah's case it confirmed that God's call was an established matter and there was no other alternative. Others have known the second call as part of the life of obedience. God will confirm that in a special way, just for His servant.

Jonah might have been tempted to tell of his experience but possibly the fish's digestive juices might have bleached him so that was unnecessary. It would take Jonah quite a few days to get to Nineveh as he would have gone north following the roads in the Fertile Crescent to the city. As he entered the city, all Jonah said was that Nineveh would be overthrown after forty days. No call for repentance, no elaboration of the message.

A great response: the people believed God, and all realized they had to change their ways and admit their sinfulness. Even the king humbled himself and made it official policy for the nation to repent and change their direction and plead with God to give them a second chance as well. God brought that about. We might be faithful in passing on God's message, but the blessing comes from God alone. Salvation is entirely God's doing.

God saw that their response was real and their turning away from their sinful behaviour was practical, so He did not bring the disaster He had planned for them. The Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that they turn from their evil ways. He also sent his prophet to deliver the sinners from disaster if only they would humble themselves and seek to please Him. Jonah knew that his passing on the message was very effective. It was short, specific and exactly what God wanted him to say. Today we might like to preach profound messages whereas God appears to bless the simple passing on of the truth in the Bible.



READ

Jonah 4 Jonah's Anger and God's Kindness

How quickly Jonah forgot that the Lord had redeemed him personally, then rescued him from drowning and given him a second chance, a second call. Yet he did not want that same grace extended towards foreigners who likewise did not deserve the kindness of the only God. People think they are the Lord's favourites and often fail to treat others in the same considerate and kind way. The Lord has no favourites. He shows no partiality. Jonah knew God by experience yet because he had his own agenda, of almost demanding the punishment of the cruel people of

Nineveh, his response was anger. He told the Lord that it was because he knew personally that God was gracious and slow to anger that prompted him to flee. Lord you and I do not see eye to eye on this matter and I think I am right, and You are wrong so end my life. The Lord asked, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

Jonah was quite rude and showed no respect by not replying to God. He wanted to put pressure on God see what would happen at the end of the forty days. The message of God had been passed on and that is how God had always acted, first by a spoken word then by action. The word had been spoken; the action must follow.

God was not going to change His mind; He had sent Jonah for that very purpose to bring about repentance in Nineveh and He got His way.

Jonah went to the east side of the city and made a shack for shade from the blazing sun. The Lord made a plant grow over Jonah to provide further protection from the heat and the misery of Jonah turned to pleasure. So many are content with transient pleasures today. As long as I am comfortable then life is good! Until the next day when a worm gnawed through the stem causing it to wither and die. Then God prepared a strong hot east wind to blow off the desert. It is called a “khamisin” in the Middle East which makes people want to commit suicide as it is unbearable. And once more Jonah wished for death. The Lord has a great sense of humour. Was He laughing at the time? He used insignificant things to teach Jonah. The timing is the miracle.

Jonah are you upset about the plant dying? To which Jonah replied that he had every right to be angry and to end it all.

How quickly he had forgotten about the people in Nineveh and shifted his attention to himself. The Lord pointed out that Jonah had nothing to do with the growth of the plant or its death, neither had he any concern for the children of Nineveh and animals without guilt. The Lord was concerned about the welfare of foreigners. As their Creator He wanted to do them good.

To his credit, Jonah recorded his failures. He recorded that he had been changed by grace but become self-centred. He, who had a One-on-one dealing with the only God, had been called to serve Him. His record reveals that God is in control of nature and is able to use anything to accomplish His purposes. His plans cannot be thwarted, even by a disobedient servant.

It is still an honour to be called by God into His service. We must not lose sight of seeking to please Him and fit in with His plans and not expect Him to fit in with ours.

What did Jonah learn from his One-on-one experience with God?

1. The Lord was gracious, slow to anger and not wanting to harm anyone. This applied to him and Nineveh.
2. The Lord was concerned about the wicked foreigners and him.
3. The Lord used people to convey His message when He could have used war or natural catastrophes.
4. The Lord involved him, a recent convert, and sent him.
5. The Lord gave him a second chance. He is not dismayed by Jonah's rejection.
6. The Lord can use anything in His created world to accomplish His purposes. The Creator of all can use all of His creation.
7. Jonah was not told what to say the first time. But God was specific the second time. Nothing to be added by Jonah, who could claim no credit. How effective obedience can be.
8. God takes vows seriously. Maybe the hymns that are sung and the promises in them.
9. God anticipates the need and how to meet that need.
10. Jonah recorded his failures admitting the Lord was right after all.
11. The Lord has a sense of humour. No anger shown to an angry man. Prepared to even tease him a little.

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITHFULNESS

Habakkuk

Missionaries share their call and concern for a certain people. Only a few become involved in their support because it is the Lord that placed that particular ministry on their hearts. This is not something natural but a work of the Spirit of God. Habakkuk was burdened with a great concern for the lifestyle and behaviour of his nation and continually cried out to God to do something, but it appeared as if God had not heard him, or even knew what was going on. However, it was the Lord who made Habakkuk conscious of the state of his society. He saw the sin of the people; plundering and violence, the lack of justice and practically no law enforcement as the wicked were everywhere. Has society changed? This could be a description of our world today. Habakkuk felt so helpless and yet when he turned to the only One who could really make a difference, all he experienced was silence.



READ

Habakkuk 1 The Prophet Questions God's Judgments

v5 The Lord told Habakkuk to look beyond the borders of his country because He was doing something that Habakkuk never imagined God could do. He was equipping the Chaldeans to become an empire to conquer other nations. They would sweep through the area and conquer all, until they made a great mistake: instead of giving the glory to God, they honoured their idols and their own efforts.

Habakkuk now had an even greater problem. His first problem was that of unanswered prayer which God dealt with. God was giving time to His people to change their ways before He used His instrument of punishment. God takes time but when He acts, He does so quickly. Note how Habakkuk dealt with his problem. He restated what he knew about God before going to the unknown.

v12 He knew that God was eternal, holy and never changed in His character. God is **so pure** that He cannot look at sin and remains silent when the wicked harm the righteous. Yet Habakkuk says that God was going to use another nation to treat others like fishermen treat fish caught in their nets. They then gave the credit to themselves.

Habakkuk's second problem was that God was using a sinful nation that knew nothing about Him to correct His sinful people who were relatively more righteous than the instrument of punishment.

However, Habakkuk recognised that once more he might be at fault and that God would give an answer that he had never thought of, so he would wait to see what the answer of the Lord would give.

When the answer came, it was for all of mankind and not just Habakkuk. It would cause people to act with enthusiasm. Once more the Lord said that He would reveal His answer at a time of His choosing. He promised Habakkuk that it would come, and should there be an apparent delay, he had to wait patiently for the answer. Those who wait for the Lord in faith will not be put to shame. Waiting is difficult for all of us, but the Lord alone knows the best time to execute His plans and reveal His will for nations and individuals.



READ

Habakkuk 2 The Just Shall Live by Faith

v4 God acknowledged that the proud Chaldeans were not upright, they were sinful, and His Word reminds us that the righteous shall live by his faith. The Hebrew word is faithfulness. That the righteous will live by his faithfulness towards God. It is used differently in the New Testament. Three times in the Bible with the emphasis each time on a different word.

Romans 1:17 For therein is the RIGHTEOUSNESS of God revealed from faith to faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 The just shall live by his FAITHFULNESS. The righteous shall live by faith.

Hebrews 10:38 My righteous one SHALL LIVE by faith.

There are times when we do not have the answers, we are baffled and dismayed or overcome with sorrow. Then the Lord says that the righteous shall continue to trust God. God will not change but remains faithful and will carry out His promises. Our part is to keep trusting that He knows what He is doing and is waiting for His appointed time.

God then deals with His attitude to the sinful people around Habakkuk as well as the sinful nation He is going to use as His instrument to punish. They are proud and not satisfied with one conquest but must continue until one day those they have conquered will rise up and do the same to them.

v9 Judgement awaits those who use dishonesty to increase their wealth and to make themselves secure against disaster.

v12 The same judgement lies in store for those who use violence and dishonesty to build a town.

v13 The personal knowledge of the Lord will be known throughout the world. He will know how every home, every town or city is established, nothing will escape His knowledge or attention.

v15 Disaster awaits those who cause others to lose their self-control through alcohol. The same will happen to those who supply the drink but this time the Lord will turn against them and they will be put to shame.

The Chaldeans worship idols made of wood, as do some of the people in Habakkuk's society. These idols are silent and have no life whereas the Lord is alive and in His holy temple. The response of the people should be that of awe in view of His holiness and power.



READ

Habakkuk 3 The Prophet's Prayer

In Habakkuk's third prayer, he is afraid but asks for revival, while the people are being punished, for the Lord restore them. Then he remembers all the times that the Lord delivered His people, through Moses, Joshua and David. Habakkuk's prayer was answered when the people returned from exile. What follows is a description of the glory of God and was full of His praise. God is awesome in His appearance and He could use anything including disease to carry out His plans. Habakkuk sees the Creator operating in His domain and sees in faith, God acting on behalf of His people to save them. This happened when the army of Sennacherib was defeated when it lay siege to Jerusalem but God acts to save His people. Is **Habakkuk 3:13** a reference to His anointed, the Christ? I think it refers to His anointed David who killed Goliath with his own weapon. **You went forth for the Yeshua "salvation" of your people and the Yeshuah of Your anointed (Messiah or Christ).**

Habakkuk sees God acting in anger but also in mercy. He concluded with a proclamation of faith in God even though the nation suffered from an economic catastrophe. He would nevertheless rejoice in the Lord and would enjoy the God of his Yeshua. His joy was in God Himself because his strength for each day was in God alone.

Habakkuk was now confident that God knew what He was doing. He prayed many times and he was honest with God who responded and dealt with each of the issues and through the experience, Habakkuk was no longer saddened by his society but blessed by his knowledge of the Lord.

UNKNOWN BUT EFFECTIVE

Malachi

Nothing is known about the origins of Malachi. The name means “the messenger of the Lord” but it could just be a title so that the message rather than the messenger is important.

Malachi revealed further promises of God. The coming Messenger of the covenant would have his way prepared by another. The Lord Himself would come to His temple. He came when the time was right. There was relative security in the time of the Roman empire with roads and secure sea lanes and the common language of Greek. God kept His promise four hundred years later when He became man and entered the temple in person, first as a baby, then as a young boy and as a grown man. They did not expect or recognise Him.

The character of the Lord is revealed, and we come face to face with the mystery of election. God makes it very clear that He loved Jacob and hated Esau.



READ

Malachi 1 Polluted Offerings to God

The best commentary on Malachi 1:1-5 would be

Romans 9:11 For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.

Romans 9:14-16 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15 For He saith to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

It clearly states that before the boys had been born or had done any good or evil, the purpose of God according to election might be established based not on the actions of the boys but on the decision of God who calls. Rebekah was told that the younger shall be served by the firstborn as it is written “**Jacob I have loved and Esau have I hated.**” God will have mercy and compassion on whom ever He wills. Salvation is entirely His doing. Esau and his descendants never included God in their decision-making. As a nation, Edom had times of plenty and famine, but God was against them.

In contrast Israel had been redeemed out of slavery then punished by being sent into exile but had been restored to the promised land.

v6 A low concept of God results in behaviour and an attitude that thinks anything will do, that God would be content with the leftovers and that which we do not need. See God in His splendour and recognise He should only have the very best. That alone would bring Him pleasure. We have become over-familiar with God and need the Holy Spirit to reveal the power and potential of God to restore the fear and sense of awe.

v8 God chose Israel for His pleasure and the theme of giving pleasure is in many verses of the prophecy. God asks them if their governor would be pleased with that which was of no value to them; the sick, lame and blind animals.

v10 God says that they do not give Him any pleasure, nor will He accept their offerings. God had to wait another four hundred years before He could say of His Son, **“This is My Son in whom I am well pleased.”** Prior to that when God created the world, He saw that it was good and when He created man in His image, He saw that it was very good. It gave Him pleasure. Jesus taught that there was rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. It gives God pleasure.

v11 God is to be revered and exalted as He is great because all over the world, His name will be great among the Gentiles who will offer prayers and a pure offering to Him. Fear means respect and awe for the great and only God. Everyone will one day stand face to face with his God. We live in His presence all the time. He knows our thoughts before we think them. He formed us in the womb, He knows our needs and the number of days we will live. We owe everything to Him our Father and our Master.

v14 Malachi tells the people that treating God with familiarity and contempt brought no pleasure to God. God Himself states that He is great, to be feared and worthy of the best.



READ

Malachi 2 Corrupt Priests

Twice in this chapter, God warns the men to guard their spirit because it is there that the battle is won or lost. Unfaithfulness begins in the spirit. Especially in a midlife crisis. The wife has lost her shape, her youth, her beauty and cannot compare with younger women. Yet his wife had shared

the difficulties and sorrows of life and deserves the rewards of love, protection and respect in her old age. Marriage is for life and couples must learn to rely on the Lord to take them through times of trial and temptation. Jesus made it very clear about the only reasons for divorce and warned that if one married a divorcee, he would be living in adultery. It appears that if there is divorce, there is then no second marriage.

Malachi teaches that words are cheap and singing hymns costs nothing. King David said that he would not offer to the Lord that which cost him nothing. The Lord of Hosts wanted to bless His people, but they had to give Him what was His. A tenth and an offering. A tenth of their oil, grain and new wine which in today's terms would be the result of their business activities.



READ

Malachi 3 The Coming Messenger

v1 What gives pleasure to God? Without faith it is impossible to please God. Hebrews 11 is a record of how people brought God pleasure. If our service drains us of energy and brings no joy, we need to discover what and how God would have us act to recover our joy and enthusiasm. All of His servants have been given different verses that proved a turning point in their following and serving the Lord. Do not copy their experience but seek a verse or aspect of the truth that the Lord has for you that will make all the difference. The Lord does the work and uses us in His own time. Another turning point was that in **Revelation 3:20** it teaches that it is to be a daily act and not once in a lifetime.

We love to gather and have barbecues and play sport but what do we talk about? Would God make a record of us, do we talk about Him and His ways, do we bring Him pleasure?

v6 He is immutable. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal that God does not change in His character and attributes. His way of Salvation has not changed. Men by their traditions and rituals have made it complicated when His solution to the problem of the sin of man is so simple.

v8 The people had to take the first step if they wanted overflowing barns as a result of His blessing in the form of rain and His prevention of disease and pests wreaking havoc in their crops. If His people really believed they owed everything to God and showed their gratitude by their generosity to God, then He would bless them.

At the moment they were under a curse, pests were eating their crops while drought caused the grapes to wither. God taught them that rain in abundance was under His control. God wanted food to be in His house as a testimony to the nations and the Gentiles who visited the temple so that the nations would exclaim that the Lord had blessed His people. Our places of worship must be a testimony of the gratitude of our hearts to the Lord.

v16 There were some people in Malachi's day that brought God pleasure. Those who feared the Lord shared with each other about the Lord and their meditations on His name or character. The Lord listened to them and heard them. He made special mention of them and said they would be His special possession when He made up His jewels and would spare them, treating them as sons.

These people met in small groups and honoured the Lord by their thoughts and actions. He made a record of their names in a special book in heaven. Jewels give ladies pleasure so these people who had given the Lord pleasure would share life with Him. It gave the Lord pleasure when His people found pleasure in what they did for Him.

Another theme in Malachi is that of covenant. It starts with His love for Israel and ends with a call to obedience to His revealed Word. The Lord started the covenant and it depends on Him. He speaks directly to the people and out of the 55 verses in the whole of the book of Malachi, 47 of them are in the first person. As a Father, He desires to bless His children. To be a witness to the other nations, they need an unbroken relationship with Himself. Therefore, the Lord hates divorce because it breaks the covenant relationship between marriage partners. He is always there as a witness of the promise of a man to the wife of his youth. She is his friend to accompany him through life and they are a union broken only by death. Their union is to produce godly children who will follow the example of their parents in their love and loyal support for each other.

God promised that people would eventually see the difference between the way He treated the righteous and the wicked even though to most, the wicked seemed to be more prosperous. It seemed to be an ongoing problem in the minds of those that wanted to bring God pleasure.

FORGIVEN? FORGIVE!

Matthew 18:21-35

Peter wanted spiritual answers. Jesus passed on principles to be followed in the lives of His disciples.



READ

Matthew 18:21-35 The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

v21 **“Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother. Seven times?”**

v22 Jesus replied that it was seventy times seven which meant that Peter would lose count of the number of times. We are not to keep a record because we too will sin against a brother and God, needing forgiveness.

v23 Jesus then taught that the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. The king was a very wealthy man as he allowed just one of his servants to run up debts totalling \$2 billion or 10,000 talents. In the time of Jesus, a day’s pay was 1 drachma, and it took 6,000 drachma to make up one talent. So the servant owed 60 million day’s worth of pay or 164,000 year’s wages! The debt was in today’s terms unpayable to indicate that man cannot repay God, it is impossible. Man cannot deal with sin although some think they can.

v25 After he had been told that he would lose his wife, children and possessions, the servant pleads with his master to give him time to repay his debt. The problem with this servant and those like him is that they do not realise how great their sin is. We sin in our thoughts, words and deeds every day of our lives which means over a thousand ways every year and it mounts up. If one is not aware of the awfulness of sin and its effect, then there is a feeling I can put it right by my own efforts.

v26 The servant pleaded with his master to withhold his anger and give him time to repay as though it were possible.

v27 The king exercises the same compassion that Jesus had for the masses and the Good Samaritan for the injured man. He was deeply moved within. The king knew the man would not be able to repay him and that with interest it would continue to mount up so he released him from the debt. The term is used elsewhere in scripture and it means “to indicate forgiveness.” When the king cancelled the debt, he showed that he was prepared to lose to gain the gratitude of a servant. He dealt with the debt in two ways. The removal of a burden by lifting it off and the cancelling of the amount. Both words are used in Psalm 32.

v28 Consider the state of the servant. He owes nothing. He no longer has a burden hanging over him that is impossible to deal with. He is free. He can continue to enjoy the companionship of his wife and he has a future as his children will provide for him. It has all been the result of an act of grace. No action on his part apart from his casting himself upon the mercy and character of the king. Those who are aware of how much they have been forgiven will love the Lord more. This servant now reveals how little this act of grace meant to him. He orders his fellow servant to pay him the 100 day's wages owed and dealt harshly with him. It was a trivial amount compared with his own debt.

v29 His fellow debtor cast himself upon the character of the man to exercise patience, withhold anger and give him time. It could be done.

v30 The forgiven servant refused and threw him into prison which he would not be able to leave because he could not earn money to pay back. He acted from short term memory loss and would pay dearly.

v31 His fellow servants saw what had happened. They too had experienced forgiveness and a cancelling of debt, so they were grieved when they saw another harshly treated. Experience grace and forgiveness and you will want the same for others. They shared their burden with the king.

v32 The king called the "forgiven" servant a second time. The reason he was forgiven was because he had cast himself on the character of his master. However, it did not result in his being filled with gratitude. When he was asked whether he should have showed the same compassion he was silent. By his own action he had taken himself out of the sphere of the love of the king and into his wrath.

v34 He was handed over to be tortured. He would never get out of the experience of wrath.

v35 Jesus said that His Father would deal with each one of His disciples who did not from his heart totally forgive his brother. When the fact of forgiveness of sin sinks deep within and you know it is undeserved, you have no other option than to treat others in the same way.

Freely you have received, freely give.

Freely you have been forgiven, freely forgive even if you might suffer loss.

There is no limit to how many times one should forgive just as God does not place a limit on how many times He forgives us. As servants of God we are not to behave as ordinary people but to act as He does. We show by our behaviour who we belong to.

GRACE: WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

Matthew 19:16 – 20:16



READ

Matthew 19:16-22 Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler

- v16 **Master, what good thing shall I do, that I might have eternal life?** Pose this question to anybody in areas of the Bible and the answer invariably is “by living a good life and doing good to others.” Nothing has changed. Two Gospels record the same encounter. In this account, the rich young ruler asks Jesus about what good thing he had to do and in the other he addressed Jesus as good. In both accounts, Jesus says that the only One that is good is God and if he thinks Jesus is good then he must conclude that Jesus is God and respond to what Jesus says as though he is hearing from God.
- v17 Jesus is saying to him that he had come to the right person, the only One who could give the truthful answer. Jesus told him to keep the commandments.
- v18 The man wanted Jesus to be more specific and asked which of them. Jesus said that he knew the commands of God which all dealt with family and property.
- v20 The man said that all those commands he had carried out since his youth. Mish mumkin (which is to say Impossible!). He was not aware of coming short of the requirements of the law. Jesus said that he lacked one thing if he wanted to be perfect.
- v21 Jesus told him to dispose of his wealth by giving it to the poor and he would be investing in heaven and then leave his family and follow Him. Mish mumkin. Wealth in Bible lands is seen as a sign that God has blessed you. Should he follow Jesus, he would be like Peter and Andrew who left their family business, the boat, and their father. It was a call to live in obedience to Jesus allowing Him to make the decisions in the future.
- v22 The young man was horrified. The call of Jesus was to leave behind wealth on which he relied to meet his future needs and family as he had obligations to care for them, and follow a man with an uncertain future with no idea as to how his future needs would be met. Yet he did not realize that Jesus was telling him to give up what he could not keep to gain what he could not lose. It was AD 32, and 38 years later Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans and the economy

shattered. If he followed Jesus he would inherit eternal life and have investments in heaven with Him.

I was called by God to serve Him in the land of Lebanon. No one in my family had ever done that. I did not know how life would unfold. It is easy to look back and see how God took care of every need but at the time it was obeying Him one step at a time. As a result, I owe what I have to the Triune God: my Salvation, health, education, wife, children, possessions, houses, indeed everything. What He has planned for the future only He knows.



READ

Matthew 19:23-30 With God All Things Are Possible

- v23 Jesus spoke to His disciples about how difficult it is for rich people who think that money is the way to solve every problem to enter the kingdom of heaven. They cannot imagine how the problems of life will be resolved without money. To trust in the invisible God to carry out His purposes as He is in control of the future and only God knows how to carry out what He has planned.
- v24 Jesus said how hard it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. It was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom. Why? It means that a rich man must stop playing god, which all people like to do. To exert power and accomplish tangible, visible goals in life thinking that they deserve to be in heaven but what a heaven it would be, where everyone will be boasting what they did to get there!
- v25 The disciples of Jesus were astonished and thought that if a person has been blessed with wealth, he cannot enter the kingdom of God if he continues to rely on wealth then who can be saved.
- v26 When a man stops dealing with men and starts dealing directly with God, then even a rich man can be saved. Jim Elliott wrote: He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.
- v27 Peter spoke to Jesus saying that the disciples had left family, property and wealth behind to follow Him and asked what they would get in return. His mistake was to have a bookkeeping mentality to expect a reward for their leaving their families and property. After all, he caught nothing the night before Jesus called him to catch men instead of fish.
- v28 Jesus dealt with Peter according to his thinking by assuring him that when the Son of Man, the Messiah sat on His throne, those who shared

in His suffering would share in His glory. Does this mean that in every country the disciples of Jesus, though despised and rejected, would one day be given places of honour on the Day of Judgement for those same countries?

Jesus told him that all His disciples will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. No longer nobodies but exalted by being drawn closer to God and carrying out the orders of the King.

v29 Then Jesus deals with everyone who has left houses and family and business because they were called by God to get involved with Jesus. They will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life because they are members of God's family even though they didn't deserve it.

Brothers or sisters are family and one seldom acts outside of the family. The father advises his children and provides for them so to leave him would be to depend only on God. Children provide for their parents in their old age and to give up the idea of children is to rely on the Lord to meet one's future needs. Lands are also a form of security and provision of security as well as a sign of the blessing of the Lord.

I can confirm that all of these promises came true as a result of my obeying the call of the Lord to follow Him. I received many older "parents" who advised me, brothers and sisters in the faith who became my family, adopted children who brought me much joy as well as others who came to faith in Christ.

God also gave me two houses, one for my family and the other for my daughter's family. In her case He acted in advance before she served Him.

v30 Jesus is teaching Peter and His disciples not to have a calculating mind of expecting to receive according to what has been done or given. Sometimes when we think we deserve much on the basis of what we have done, nothing happens. Years ago, I was called to preach without warning, I was given liberty by the Lord and souls were saved to His glory alone. God does the unexpected all the time so that no one will take the credit, and all will praise Him for what has been accomplished. To reinforce this statement, Jesus taught His disciples the parable of the workers in the vineyard.



READ

Matthew 20:1-4 The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

Jesus had to teach Peter and us that God in His character and dealings with us is totally different to man. He did so in the parable of the workers in the vineyard which is about the kingdom of God with the landowner representing God.

In every town and village in the Middle East there is a central place where unskilled people gather to be hired. It is usually near a market. After buying vegetables, people bargain with the workers over their price for conveying the load to their home. There is bargaining over the distance and weight until both decide in advance on the payment. People prefer to eat fresh meat, vegetables and bread, and they obtain that in the market. Bread is usually flat and round and is used to convey the food to the mouth out of dishes. The hireling will then return to the marketplace to serve others. He needs those wages to provide for the needs of his family for that day.

Workers turn up early to do a whole day's work for a whole day's wages.

The landowner is exceptional. His behaviour is contrary to normal behaviour. He does the unexpected because he has his own reasons. In fact, he wants to teach the workers about himself.

The landowner went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. The workers **stipulated** their fee: a day's wages or denarius for a day's work. This is normal everyday practice. He agreed and sent them into his vineyard.

At the third hour or 9 o'clock in the morning, he returned to find others standing in the marketplace waiting to be hired or who had returned from elsewhere. These he sent into his vineyard without any haggling but only with a vague, "I will pay you whatever is right." The workers knew he was a man to be trusted and went to work.

The first group were just like Peter who told Jesus what they had done and what it cost them. Imagine that: for three years with no regular home situation, trying to provide for their needs, together with having to deal with a hostile environment in the towns from the religious leaders.



READ

Matthew 20:5-7

At noon and at 3 p.m. he went again and again and noticed that there were more men without work. He was concerned about their welfare and the needs of their families, so he hired them and said he would pay them

whatever is right. With only one hour to go at 5 o'clock he went again and asked their reason for not working. They said that nobody had hired or needed them. He told them to go and work. On this occasion, there was no mention of money. It is the last hour and should the Lord call you, you must be ready to respond and leave your reward to Him.

Apart from the first group, was there any indication of how much he would pay the workers? He said he would pay those hired at 9 whatever is right without any haggling. The fact that the workers went and worked in his vineyard without any idea how much they would be paid indicates that they **trusted** him. Who would hire workers today for only an hour's work without any mention of pay, which is what the landowner did?



READ

[Matthew 20:8-16](#)

At the end of the working day the landowner acted very strangely but what follows is even more unexpected. He calls his foreman to pay the workers their wages and to pay those hired last, first. Why? If those hired first were paid first, then they would have learned nothing about the kindness of the owner. After each group is given more than they expected the first group also received a day's wages and started complaining that all the others had been made equal to them. The landowner pointed out that they had stipulated the amount and that is what they received. One can imagine they complained all the way home. The same would apply to those who keep a record of their activities and efforts and expect a return based on that from God.

The parable teaches us about the character of God:

1. **God is unchanging.** The foreman knew how much to give to each group because his master treated everyone the same. God does not change but always acts in accordance with His Word and character.
2. **God acts in mysterious ways** to draw our attention to His nature. He places us in strange circumstances to teach us about Himself. He takes workers away from their society and places them where they need to depend on Him. Though God will always act in accordance with His nature, He seldom works in the same way twice and one can never predict how He will work or provide the next time.
3. **God does the unexpected.** Compare Matthew 19:30 with 20:16. Do you notice the difference? Jesus says the same truth but in different ways. He will do that again and again in other passages and parables. He never repeats Himself. He will provide a way of escape from

temptation every time we turn to Him for help so that we learn to rely on Him and not a method. Do not restrict God or place Him in a box of your past expectations or experiences. He delights in surprising us!

4. **God is trustworthy** as the workers trusted the word of the owner even when there was no mention of pay. True faith relies on God and not on a back-up system in case He fails. God has never failed a person who has trusted Him solely. **Psalm 37:25 I was young and now am old yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.**
5. **God is prepared to lose to gain you.** How many of you would hire someone for only an hour and give them a whole day's wages? Why not? Because it is not a wise use of money? Because the labourer is worthy of his hire and does not deserve it? You know the real reason is that you do not want to lose. However, God is prepared to lose to make us members of His family. **2 Corinthians 8:9 Though He was rich yet for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might become rich.** The workers would always remember the owner with gratitude. God does not think in terms of profit although the Servant of the Lord would see the results of His suffering and be satisfied. Jesus had no house of His own, no property, even the payment of the temple tax was through catching a fish. He was prepared to be poor that we might be eternally rich. He requires His servants to accept a lower standard of living to reach those who need Him in poorer countries.
6. **God values the worker rather than the work.** Why did the owner keep returning for workers at nine, noon, three and five o'clock? Surely he could have waited another day? He knew that every worker needed a day's wages to buy the food his family needed that day. So he was more concerned about them and their needs than the amount of work they did for Him. The Lord is more concerned about you as an individual than what you do for Him. Sometimes workers in difficult areas have seen little fruit but have drawn closer to God and their lives have been transformed.
7. **The Lord has no favourites** but treats everyone the same. Jesus said that your Father sends rain upon the evil and the just. All received a denarius. We need not be jealous of others as the Lord has promised to provide the needs of those who seek His kingdom. He invites us to ask that we might receive.
8. **God rewards those who serve without thought of reward.** The owner rewarded the last group with a day's wages even though in their case

there was no mention of money. We too serve out of gratitude not to receive a reward.

9. **God invites us to keep on asking for different things.** The owner never found fault with any of the groups but sent them to work in his vineyard. The workers were not to live with regret that they had not been hired or come into a relationship with the owner sooner. Do not let the past hold you back but use every opportunity that comes your way. We are to ask God for wisdom, and He will give and not upbraid one for asking many times.
10. **The Lord is sovereign** and claims the right to use His resources as He chooses. He provides according to His own purpose and in His own time. He will have mercy on whomever He wills.
11. **God is generous to all.** The owner gave to all except the first group, more than they expected. The father said to his older son, “All that I have is yours.” That is what God says to all of us but we are to ask, seek and knock.
12. **God uses sinners.** The owner showed humility in returning again and again to get workers to work in his vineyard. Amazing that the Lord sends labourers into His harvest. That He uses sinners and transforms them and blesses their ministry if they walk in humility with Him.

The first group who were paid last left complaining and without an appreciation of the kind landowner. Those hired at nine, twelve and three did not envy those hired at five because they too received what they did not deserve. Those who experience grace rejoice when others experience that same grace.

God works in **mysterious** ways to get our attention. He uses unusual people. The weak and not the strong. Samson in his weakness. David as a boy against Goliath. Jesus crucified.

GRACE: SHARING A MEAL AND LIFE

Matthew 22:1-16

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son. Marriages are arranged by the father who deals with other members of the larger family. In this way the background, health and quality of the spouses are known and the wealth stays within the larger family. The king sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding. They had been notified before arrangements were made for the wedding and only after everything was in place, were they called upon to respond and act out their initial response.



READ

Matthew 22:1-16 The Parable of the Wedding Feast

- v2 It is a wedding banquet, a time of great rejoicing, an opportunity to share life through the feast with the king and his family.
- v3 The king could have commanded their presence but instead he invited them to participate. They were not willing. Very appropriate words as it depends on the decision of the will whether a person shares life with God. The king did not mind the first refusal as is the custom in the Middle East to find out if the invitation is really meant. One does not get a feeling or a sudden revelation but after the facts of God's provision of salvation are known, a decision of the will is required to exercise faith in the King.
- v4 The king sent other servants to detail the preparations he had made to show that he was serious, that he had done his utmost to make the wedding a success and those invited were really welcome to enjoy life with him. The oxen and fattened cattle had been killed so that much would have been left over to reveal his generosity. All they had to do was get up and come. So simple. They did not have to bring anything or do anything except be present and enjoy what had been provided.
- v5 They treated the invitation and description of provision for their enjoyment with contempt and went their ways. One went to his field or farm or business and another to his possessions or merchandise. They both said that those things were more important to them than their relationship with the king. It never occurred to them just how important the king was or how great his provision.
- v6 One way to reject an invitation is to ignore it. Another way is to actively oppose it. The servants were treated harshly and killed them.

- v7 The king heard what had happened and put to death those who had killed his servants and destroyed their city. They not only lost an opportunity of a relationship with the king but everything else as well. Their businesses, possessions and life itself.
- v8 The king has many servants. He speaks to them that the arrangements are still in place but those who rejected the invitation were not worthy to enjoy it or grow in their relationship with the king.
- v9 The king tells his servants to go to the highways outside of the city, those who had no connection with the people who rejected the invitation. It was an invitation to all. This was carried out and they not only took a message but brought the people to the wedding as well. This was necessary because they might not have known the locality or what to do.
- v10 Who were the good and who were the bad? The Gentiles were known as sinners **Galatians 2:15 We are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners.** So, the bad were the Gentiles and the good, Jews who at least had the Law even if they did not obey it.
- v11 People who travel, take with them the clothes they wear together with a set for important occasions. Failure to wear your best set shows that you do not value the event or the host. Actions speak louder than words. What a person is will be obvious to all. Of all those invited only one man wore the clothes he was travelling in.
- v12 The man stuck out like a sore thumb and when the king entered the area of the feast, he saw the man immediately. He asked him how he had got in without a wedding garment or his best set of clothes. Why did you not value my invitation and consider me worthy of your best? The man is speechless, but his dress betrays him and excuses are useless.
- v13 Because the man had failed to recognise the worthiness of the king and not value his relationship with him by wearing his best, he now loses control over his destiny. He is thrown into an eternity of regret.
- v14 Many are called but few are chosen. Only those who are invited and regard their relationship with the king to be the most important matter on earth will be chosen to share life eternally.

The kingdom of God will be full, but many will be lost and live in shame and regret.

GIFTS ALIVE! USE THEM!

Matthew 25:14-30

Talanton (Greek – Ταλάντων) means something weighed. A Talent was not a coin but a unit of monetary value. In the time of Jesus, a day's pay was 1 drachma, and it took 6000 drachma to make up one talent. Today a talent refers to natural or acquired ability, but it does not mean that in this parable. The master gives out of his vast resources in accordance with the created ability of each servant. He seeks to make full use of his servant's potential so he gives to each a different amount and each could give a 100% return on his investment. We are not to imitate another because we are all unique in our potential and the resources at our disposal.

We have only one master and are responsible to him alone.



READ

Matthew 25:14-30 The Parable of the Talents

There are three servants and they represent all servants just as the three excuses in the Great Supper represent all excuses.

The parable deals with the servants of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is clear that if a person is a true servant it will be seen in his actions. In Luke 15 the evidence that a person is found is his continued restoration so in this parable a true servant is seen by his attitude to his master.

v15 The master gives to one 82 year's wages, (this enormous sum is based on the calculation that one day's pay is one drachma, with 6000 drachma equal to one talent. Therefore, to be given five talents is to be given 6000 drachma x5 talents x365 days=82 year's pay!!). To another he gives 32 year's wages and a third 16 year's wages. He trusts them and allows them to use his resources as they choose because he is going away on a long journey. He gives them total freedom as he will not be there to check up on them and should they invest badly at first, he gives them time to switch investments to get a better return.

v16 The most important act of the servant is his response to the trust of his master. He who was given five talents recognised that he had been accorded a great honour to be entrusted with so much of his master's resources. They were vast indeed as his master regarded 82 year's wages as a few things. When his master left, he immediately invested or used what he was given knowing that he was acting for the benefit of his master and not himself. He did not think about his limitations. Too many concentrate on their sense of lack instead of using what they

have. God often gives us tasks that cannot be done without His aid and provision.

The tasks given by God will always be greater than our natural ability. We need to draw daily upon His readily available resources. The first servant had a 100% return.

v17 The servant with two talents was given less because he had less ability. He did not question the decision of his master nor did he complain or envy his fellow servant. He brought in a 100% return.

v18 The third servant was given 16 year's wages which is still a large amount but had the same possibility of a double return. We need to follow his reasoning. "My master has given me a large amount. If I work hard, I will not get anything because I will have to give everything back to my master. There will be nothing for me. He is a hard man." So, because he regarded the talent as dead, he buried it. Those that have no esteem for their creator think that the Bible is a useless book and know nothing of the Holy Spirit. The Bible regards them as already dead in their sins.

Psalm 18:25-26 To the merciful You show Yourself as merciful;
To the righteous You show Yourself as righteous;
To the pure You show Yourself as pure;
To the crooked You show Yourself as shrewd.

The same God to all yet seen differently and therefore their behaviour is different. The last servant was given time to change, to admit his error and that he had a false conception of his master due to lack of information.

v19 After a long time, the master returns but gives no warning of his imminent arrival because sufficient time had elapsed for the growth of his resources. The servants were not cross-examined. Each one revealed what he had done. We will be the computer that the Lord will use to keep a record of our lives and how we have used our Master's resources.

v20 The first admitted that he had doubled the investment and gave all to his master without any thought of himself.

v21 He is praised for his faithfulness and good character and elevated though still a servant, to be given greater responsibility. He is invited to share the joy of his master, no longer to leave him because he had recognised the worth of his master.

v22 The second servant was treated in the same way because he had realised his full potential.

v24 The last servant also revealed all and said that he regarded his master as a hard man who gained through the hard work of others. He did not know that his master rewarded his faithful servants.

v25 Fear in the servant paralysed his actions and caused him to bury his talent. He regarded the talent as dead. The Bible and the Holy Spirit, means nothing to those who have no relationship with God. He was called wicked and lazy. Wicked because of his false idea of his master and lazy because he did nothing. Why was the talent not given to bankers to earn interest as it had the potential in itself to grow if rightly used?

v26 The wicked servant shows that he is not a servant at all and loses while the first servant kept getting more.

v27 What are the resources of the kingdom of heaven? The resources are alive and have the potential for growth just as money in a bank account earns interest. The resources belong to God and will return to Him the Bible as the Word of God is alive. The Holy Spirit gives insight. Should people be obedient to the word revealed, they will be given further insight.

v29 Everyone who has will be given more.

v30 The wicked servant is expelled because of his attitude and lack of involvement. He loses control of his destiny and faces an eternity of sorrow.

The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. He reminds us of the Word and seeks to exalt the person of Jesus. Allow Him to be in control and He will give greater freedom and usefulness.

Life itself is a resource of God. We all have only one life. We need to recognise that life is precious and time limited so we must make full use of every opportunity to do the will of God. God said to the rich fool that his soul would be required. It was on loan and the loan was called in. God will provide the finance and means to do His will.

Accounts will be settled by our Master. All judgement has been given to the Son, the Lord Jesus. Our response will determine our future treatment. Our response is according to our concept of our Master who will respond in the same way towards us. There will be either great joy or great sorrow.

KEY TO A HARVEST – LISTEN WELL

Mark 4:1-29

The Lord Jesus used many parables in connection with farming as it played a major role in the economy of the region and all the people would have understood the aspects of it. His first parable was that of the Sower and He used it to introduce all the parables.

The field was ploughed four times a year. Prior to the first rains after the long dry summer to break up the ground. Then again after some rain had fallen for the water to soak deep down. A third time prior to the sowing of the seed and the last time after the seed was sown to cover it up.



READ

Mark 4:1-9 The Parable of the Sower

The ground is therefore well prepared for the planting of the seed. The sower would place a small bowl in his bag of seed and scatter the seed over the ploughed ground. Some would fall on the path bordering the field others would fall on rocky ground where there was not much soil. The farmer is aware of the broken ground and what lies below. Some would fall in areas where the weeds, thorn seeds and grass have been turned under so that their seeds would be there. Most of the seed would fall on good deep soil. The final ploughing is essential otherwise the birds would be able to see and eat.

The parable is all about how people listen to the implications of the preaching or reading of the Word of God. Jesus told parables so that the truth thereof would be hidden from the casual listener who was not interested. It requires study and meditation to unearth the gems in the Bible. Jesus told His listeners to use their ears and listen well. It is possible to hear while at the same time your thoughts are elsewhere and what is heard vanishes quickly.



READ

Mark 4:10-12 The Purpose of Parables

When Jesus was alone, His disciples came to Him and asked Him to explain the parables. He makes it clear that only those who want to understand the truth and apply it in their lives will be given insight. So often the scriptures are read without analysing what has been said. Ask questions. Find answers and record what has been discovered.



READ

Mark 4:13-20 The Parable of the Sower Explained

The **seed falling on the path** is like casual listeners who hear the truths about God and man but do not understand anything nor do they take the trouble to get an explanation. Satan then removes the word. It is forgotten and fails to reproduce.

The **seed falling on rocky ground** is like the people who receive the truth, realize there is good news but fail to perceive the cost. Theirs's is a shallow experience. Every follower of Jesus Christ will have trials and persecution especially if he is a bold witness. Others in his society will try to discourage him. Opposition comes as a surprise and they soon fall away. Forces outside of us opposed to our salvation must be recognised and a decision must be made not to be hindered by them.

The **seed that fell among the thorns and weeds** grew up with those thorns and weeds. In all of us there are sinful desires that will seek to strangle the spiritual life of the individual: thought patterns, habits and pleasing oneself. Jesus refers to the worries of this life concerning the future, the concern about clothes, food and shelter and the deceitfulness of wealth which promises the solution to all problems but hides that it will not last and other evil desires choke the Word sown and it does not produce fruit. We need to beware of the forces within us prior to the experience of Salvation.

Other **seed is sown in good ground** which has been well prepared. These listened well and have taken into account the weakness and opposition of the old nature as well as to expect opposition from family and others who do not understand. Aware of this, they recognise their daily dependence on Him who has begun a good work in them and provided they kept trusting Him, He would complete that work. Some will reproduce thirty times others sixty and others a hundred times more depending on how well they have listened.

The fault does not lie with the seed but how it is received. The key to the harvest is how much has been understood. The same thing applies to a teacher and his students. Those who listen and understand do well in examinations.



READ

Mark 4:21-25 Light Under a Basket

Jesus said that a lamp was never intended to be hidden but to give light. The Word of God was never meant to be obscure. Nothing is hidden that

will not be revealed nor will any secret not be made known. We are encouraged to investigate the truth and find out its implications for our lives.

Jesus tells us to be careful what we hear. The amount of time we give to hearing, listening and obeying will determine the amount we will yet receive. Respond by obedience to what you hear, and you will be given further instructions and insight. There is a warning that if we stop listening then what we already have we will start to forget. We cannot stand still or take a spiritual holiday. We either grow or backslide and start losing what we had.



READ

Mark 4:26-29 The Parable of the Growing Seed

Jesus says that the Word of God is as if a sower should scatter seed. Then he forgets about it. He goes to sleep and lives a normal life while the seed grows in stages. Once we play our part, God acts while we are sleeping. The farmer does not know how it grows for it does so mysteriously.

Our task is to read and understand and share the truths with others and leave the results to God. It is certain that the Word will grow first the blade, then the head, then the full grain in the head. It grows in stages and this takes time calling for perseverance on the part of the servant.

When the harvest is ready, the reaper acts immediately.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD

Luke 4:16-22

Politicians make promises that they cannot keep so that they will be re-elected for another period of inactivity apart from their own welfare.

Imagine a person promising you that if elected, he will have the power to do the following:

1. I will be able to change the complaints of the poor to rejoicing because the situation will be radically different.
2. I will radically change the health of those who are suffering.
3. Those who are bound by addiction, I will solve their problem and free you.
4. When I carry out my program, your eyes will be opened to how different I am to others who are vying for your attention and support.
5. Everything will be different once I am elected. You will never have it so good.
6. Once in power, crime will not pay but will be punished.
7. I will transform society and there will be singing in the streets.
8. People will be changed and not return to the dismal lives of the past year.
9. People will be changed because if I am elected, I will have the power to carry out my promises.

Would you believe this politician? Is it too good to be true? Are these promises possible? Do you know that an elected One has carried out His promises and millions can say it is so.

Would you be surprised to hear that all these promises were made a long time ago and the person who was elected is able to carry out these promises today, and He is here, present and among us.



READ

Luke 4:16-22 Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

In 700 BC, we meet this extraordinary person who tells us about Himself and what He can do to transform individuals and society. He was in existence in those days (**Isaiah 61:1-3**). He made His appearance in His hometown and read out what He had promised 700 years before He Himself fulfilled it. He had the power to carry out His promises and bring radical change for anyone.

He tells us about Himself and why He can do that which is not possible for any other person.

Our Condition

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me. The God who appeared to Moses. The only God. What does it mean that the Spirit of God is upon Him? It means that God is present in power to carry out the task designated.

The Lord anointed Me. I am special, set apart as the Messiah, the chosen One. To do what? Everyone has a different need. The poor are helpless, and others take advantage of them. All mankind is initially poor spiritually but can be rich now and forever. You will rejoice more than those whose olive oil and grain abound because your every need will be met in this life and the next and in fact will abound.

To preach the good news to the poor. What is the good news? Jesus Himself deals with the problem that separates the poor from God. He alone deals with the problem of sin and through Him alone God comes to live in man. No longer poor because God is present. No longer helpless for the same reason.

The Lord God has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted. This not only applies to those who mourn for loved ones but those who are hurting through the treatment of others and the experiences of life. I have been sent to meet your specific needs. How? Jesus said that He personally was sent to do the work of healing. If you deal directly with Him, the things that cause you to be broken-hearted will be healed.

My message is to proclaim liberty to the captives. I will liberate those who are bound by sin which makes slaves of every person. Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin that can only be broken by the power of the One who must deal with the problem of sin and break its power by defeating death itself. Jesus alone can take the place of the sinner because He Himself knew no sin. His resurrection showed that sin and death had been defeated. He who has the Son, has life which will never end even though the body is wearing out and comes to a stop. You can be a prisoner of prejudice, racial or otherwise. A prisoner of fear, anger, resentment, envy, the love of money, fear of the future, Jesus' message is that, through Him present in your life, you can be free.

Recover the sight to the blind. Eyes are opened when we realise that this chosen One has done what He promised to do. They are indeed FREE. WOW! No longer a slave. Freedom to enjoy life as it was meant to be.

The Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit will cause us to realise that these are the promises of God's Anointed and He will indeed do what He has promised.



READ

Isaiah 61:1-3 The Good News of Salvation

Age of Grace followed by Day of Accounting: GOD'S PART

To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. A year is a long time, and we are in the Lord's favour. From the moment a personal response has been made to the Lord God's chosen one, they will enter the world of grace, the atmosphere of grace, and grace upon grace when there is nothing to cause shame between the Creator and His creation, between the Father and His son or daughter who is able to enjoy His company and it gives him pleasure to talk about Him.

Saul of Tarsus wrote "I am what I am by the grace of God." Previously a murderer, breaker of families and persecutor of the church but by the grace of God an apostle to the nations. God's Grace is sufficient to carry us through every circumstance of life. Grace is God's undeserved love which saved us and drew us to Himself. God's Grace is able to keep us from falling and present us faultless before Himself. When we all get to heaven, we will shout "Your Grace saved me, kept me, helped me, enabled me to be useful. I owe You all."

The day of vengeance of our God when every sin will be dealt with and every sinner will have to give account. God's vengeance will last a day, indicating a short time. No sin will be forgotten or hidden from view. Every word, thought and action will be openly confessed and dealt with by God. You will be asked "What did you do with your life to glorify Me?" What you sow, you will reap. God has no desire for the death of those who go their own way but that they turn and submit themselves to Him and have life. Jesus said this because He came not to condemn the world but to save it. Through Jesus' death and Resurrection your past can be wiped clean and you will have His righteousness.

The Results of Grace: GOD'S DECISION and HIS ACTION

Grace: what God wants for us and Gives for our comfort.

To comfort all those who mourn. For the loss of loved ones or who sense deep within a consciousness of wrong within, to give them a garland instead of ashes. Note: Garland for the head (mind) and garment for the body (heart).

Oil of gladness instead of mourning. In other words, a joyful, thankful, glad, rejoicing individual.

A garment of praise instead of a dull depressed spirit. A new creation that brings pleasure to himself, others and his God. Why so many words? Because one word is insufficient to describe the change that Jesus brings. A new creation, a new person, a new life, joy that does not depend on money, sport, people and circumstances but the joy of God and His peace.

Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified. A large tree takes time to grow. It needs food, water, sunshine, time, care. Every tree that the Father has not planted will be uprooted. When the Lord does the planting and feeding, we will become an oak of righteousness. God's righteousness; and the Lord alone will be glorified and praised.

We are to be rejoicing because whatever our previous state of heart, the Lord's anointed One is able to bring about radical change and bring us into a new atmosphere of Grace. Either respond to God and enjoy His grace or go your own way and face God on your own in eternal punishment.

He is the only One you can trust to carry out His promises. Millions have discovered that. Jesus alone brings about radical change when He is elected, chosen to be the One who is in control of our lives. There is an important decision to be made and to become a large tree of righteousness requires a daily submission to this Jesus. That is proof that a person is planted by the Lord to grow and be for His glory for time and eternity.

At the prediction of the birth of Jesus in **Isaiah 9:6**, the character/nature of the son born would be **The Wonderful Counsellor (The Holy Spirit), The Everlasting Father, The Mighty God, the Prince of Peace (Jesus)**.

Prior to that, David said in **Psalms 110:1** **The Lord said to my Lord sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool**. He went on to say that his Lord was a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

God is present in all our thoughts, words and actions. Nothing is too hard for Him and He is omni-competent. He does all things well. God wants to be involved in every aspect of our lives but the reason that so few know so little of His involvement is because they only turn to Him in a crisis. He will not work in our lives until we invite Him in to our lives, our homes, our business and recreational activities and until we look forward to just talking to Him, without requests or an agenda of our own. This is the God who created us who, through the Holy Spirit, lives in us. Do I understand the mystery of the Trinity? No. I am in awe of God. Holy, pure, awesome in power, in knowledge and ability to change lives.

God's ways are not to be understood. He is to be worshipped and obeyed.

ANTICIPATORY FORGIVENESS

Luke 7:36-50

Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee who tried to live strictly according to the law by following so many extra rules to keep the Torah. He was viewed as very religious and recognized by his dress and behaviour. Simon wanted to find out about Jesus. Where did He get His teaching and is He really a prophet? How does He perform miracles? The only way to find out is to invite Jesus into his home. He should have provided water for His feet, offered Him a meal, made Him feel at home with a place to relax. He does none of these things and in fact his behaviour is an insult. He might have heard Jesus say in [Matthew 11:28-29](#) **Come to Me...and I will give you rest. 29 ...learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**

Is that so? Simon thought “If I provoke this man by my behaviour it would show that He does not practise what He preaches. His words are just words.” Go to any home, rich or poor and water is provided, the best is brought out, the host wants to be held in high esteem. Simon does not care what Jesus thinks of him. He wants to find out about this Jesus.



READ

[Luke 7:36-50](#) A Sinful Woman Forgiven

v36 Jesus entered his home and reclined at the table. He would have rested on his left elbow because one does all the unclean things with your left hand. He would have eaten with His right hand. The food would be on low tables or in poor homes on mats on the floor. The feet are turned away so as not to insult the host. The feet are the most unclean visible part of the body and are never pointed towards people.

Jesus would have left His sandals at the entrance of the house and should have been given a bowl of water to wash his feet and hands or be attended to by a servant to do that for Him. It should have been a One-on-one meeting but people from the village would be curious to hear and see what Jesus would say and do.

v37 There was a woman who had heard of Jesus forgiving sinners. She was probably a prostitute who had to use perfume to keep herself attractive for her clients. That life would now be behind her and she had no use for the perfume. The woman anticipated that Jesus would forgive her, so she decided to do something special for this Man who was Someone special to her and many others like her.

She saw Jesus enter the home of that religious man called Simon who had no dealings with her and avoided her. She entered the house of Simon just after Jesus, something she had never done before. Indeed, she had been taken into the houses of many men in her village and had never intruded without an invitation. She ignored the men because her only thought was Jesus. She took into account that Simon would have provided water, a towel and servants. She expected Jesus to be well received and treated with honour. She could then pour the costly ointment on His head or feet as evidence of her gratitude. Grace or charis had been shown to her and she wanted to extend gratitude or charis to Jesus. No thought of what she would get out of this, but it must have given Jesus pleasure. Few special things were done for Him in His life. So, this is a happening that gave Him joy, the joy of true repentance, the lost being found, the dead alive again.

v38 When she saw the insults of Simon in his treatment of Jesus, it caused her to weep. Jesus did not respond to the hostile attitude of Simon. How He must have had pleasure from the act of love by the woman. He had to defend her actions and support her response of love and gratitude for what He was about to do for her. It was a One-on-one event for her and Jesus, as though there was no one else in that house. Jesus treated it like that and ignored what Simon or any other thought. She washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and because there was no towel, she let down her hair and wiped His feet. She then started to kiss His feet over and over as she poured the perfume over them. She says nothing because her love is expressed in her actions. Jesus does not disturb her and allows her to continue.

v39 Simon who is highly critical of both the woman and Jesus. He probably rejected Jesus in his mind for allowing her to kiss His feet and pour costly ointment on them. Jesus comes to the defence of the woman and shows that Simon is at fault and needing forgiveness. He knew the thoughts of Simon and spoke to him as though Simon had actually commented out loud.

v40 Jesus told Simon that He had something to say to him that would not be pleasant to hear, so Simon told Jesus to speak up.

v41 Jesus told him a parable about two people who owed money, the one a great deal and the other a little.

v42 Both were forgiven or offered grace and released from their debts. Jesus asked Simon which of the two would love the creditor more.

v43 Simon did not give a straight answer but uses the word “suppose” to save face but suggested the one that was forgiven the most.

v44 Jesus turned to the woman and what followed was all in praise of the woman, while revealing the failures of Simon in front of the people in the village. This would have offended Simon, but Jesus is prepared to state the truth to expose the behaviour of people, just as He cleansed the temple when people had turned it into a den of thieves.

- When Simon gave no water, the woman used her tears.
- He supplied no towel, so she used her hair.

v45 Simon showed no love or care, but she kept kissing His feet from the time she entered Simon’s home.

v46 Simon had not regarded Jesus as special by anointing Him with oil, so the woman anointed His feet with the costliest perfume.

v47 Jesus then said that her many sins were forgiven therefore she loved much in anticipation of that forgiveness. She loved out of an awareness of how much she needed to be forgiven. Simon has not been forgiven so has no love for Jesus.

V50 Jesus confirms that the faith of the woman had saved her, and she leaves with His peace. She trusted that He would forgive her.

The woman had dealt directly with Jesus and lost her fear of society and its expectations. Westerners are reticent about expressing love publicly because we are too bound by our culture and need the Holy Spirit to pour the love of God into our hearts so that we are not afraid to express that love publicly.

- The disciples, apart from Matthew who invited Jesus to his home for a meal, hardly did anything for Jesus.
- Many women provided out of their means.
- Joseph and Nicodemus looked after His body; it is recorded for eternity.

We have all been forgiven a great deal, but few realize just how much they have been forgiven. Our response of love, obedience and willingness to humble ourselves and be servants of one another would indicate our gratitude and love for the Lord Jesus. He is worthy of our best. What we received from Him was undeserved. What have we done for Him?

YOU DECIDE

Luke 9:57-62

Three men were challenged about following Jesus. We do not know what their response was and so once we know the details, we must be prepared to make the response.

The disciples had a free education for three years as they followed Jesus. They were able to travel to cities and towns and the surrounding countryside with their desire to travel and see life as a fringe benefit.



READ

Luke 9:57-62 The Cost of Discipleship

v57A man observed Jesus and came to the conclusion that he only had to gain if he became His disciple. That man also noticed that the disciples were well-fed by the women as they went from place to place. He had everything to gain and nothing to lose and therefore said to Jesus, “I will follow You wherever You go.” He had made the right decision to follow Jesus because Jesus is the only way to the Father, He alone has the words of eternal life. He also made the right kind of decision because it was unconditional and the only kind that is acceptable to God. However, this man has not taken into account the cost.

v58Jesus makes this clear to him through a short parable that foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man had no place of His own. Jesus was in fact saying that the young man had indeed made the right choice to follow Him because He was the Son of Man, the Messiah and Christ as promised in the book of Daniel (see **Daniel 2:44-45**, **7:7-28**, **9:24-27**, **12:1-4**). Everyone would one day bow the knee to Him, and His kingdom would never be destroyed. But the Son of Man had no place that he owned. The birds of the air had nests and foxes have holes. Herod was called a fox by Jesus and he was in control of an area, but Jesus said that He was not there to stay. He was only passing through and if that man wanted to follow Him, he would have to adopt the same attitude. Ahead of Jesus was suffering and death. Would the man still follow Him taking that into account? We do not know of his reply so you and I must make the decision. Jesus is indeed the only One to follow to enter the kingdom of God and it has to be unconditional. Am I prepared to follow Him even if it results in personal loss?

v59 Jesus told another man, “Follow Me.” Jesus did not promise or warn the man about anything. Once more the call is unconditional. Jesus calls people today to take the first step of obedience.

Jesus invites us to come and follow Him “one step at a time”. Live out that step until the next one. The man, if he followed Jesus, would cease to plan his own way and would leave that matter to God. He replied that he must first bury his father and then he would be able to follow Jesus. We know his father was not dead because he was there in the presence of Jesus and not making preparations for the funeral. Jesus would not have called him if that had been the case. A son would say to his father that he would bury him which meant that he would look after him in his old age until he died. This son is saying to Jesus that he had an obligation to bury his father and then when he had fulfilled it, he would be free to follow Jesus. It is the year 32AD and only 38 years later Jerusalem would be destroyed by Rome. Had he not responded to Jesus immediately, the opportunity of following Him would have disappeared forever.

v60 Jesus told him to allow the other members who had not heard His call to look after his father in his old age so that he who had heard such a call, could respond. Jesus told him to go immediately and proclaim the kingdom of God. Did he go? We do not know. Once more you and I must make the response. We do not know the future, or how long our society will endure or how much time we still have. We must, like Paul, ask the Lord what He would have us to do.

v61 Another volunteer combines an offer to follow Jesus with a condition. Note that the last two used the term “But first”. So many times, we put ourselves first and it is our agenda that we must first achieve before we think of obedience to the Lord. This man is trying to do two things at the same time. He wants to follow Jesus but feels he must first go home and ask his parents’ permission for him to follow Jesus. Here Jesus finds fault with this man’s offer. The man is saying that as a member of his family he needs to discuss the idea of following Jesus and get their approval. His parents would ask many questions.

- How much did Jesus pay? Nothing.
- Where is He going? I do not know.
- What is there in your following for us? Nothing.
- How will you provide for us? I cannot.

They would advise him not to follow Jesus. He would then return to Jesus and admit that he could not follow Him because of his parents' decision.

v62 Jesus tells him that if anyone put his hand to the plough and kept looking back, he would be of no use to the kingdom of God. If the field had already been ploughed once and another came to plough with a divided heart, possibly viewing the girls that walked by or other things that caught his attention, the oxen would not go in straight lines and the furrows would be spoilt. The one coming after him would have a difficult time rectifying the confusion. What was the man's response? We do not know. We must supply the answer. Does Jesus have your undivided loyalty? Are you held back by what family and friends say?

Three different people represent all. There are no volunteers in the service of God. Jesus told us to ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest. God calls, He does the sending. The Holy Spirit called for Barnabas and Saul to spread the good news.

When God calls, He has His own purpose which His servants discover over time. His blueprint for our lives is known only to Him. Notice with all three it was a One-on-one event as if there was no other.

Who will go? Here am I. Send me. Wait for God.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25-37



READ

Luke 10:25-37 The Parable of the Good Samaritan

- v25 An expert of the law asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life.
- v26 Jesus asked him what he had read in the law.
- v27 He replied that he must love the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength and all his mind and to love his neighbour as himself.
- v28 Jesus told him that he was correct and told him to do that all the time under all circumstances and he would come alive. The standard is impossible.
- v29 The expert in the law wanted to have a limit to such an impossible standard so that he could say that he had carried out the requirements to inherit eternal life. So, he asked Jesus who was his neighbour. He wanted a list and expected Jesus to say his neighbour was his fellow Jew and family members, so Jesus had to teach him that his neighbour was anyone who crossed his path who was in need.
- v30 A man of unknown origin and family was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him. They removed all his clothing, beat him up for resisting and left him half dead. In other words, he was totally helpless. He could not be identified by his clothes nor by his speech. He could be either Jew or Gentile.
- v31 A priest, a religious man of the highest status in society happened to be going down the road and when he saw the man, passed by on the other side. He did that because if the man was not a Jew but an unclean Gentile, he would have to declare that he was unclean and lose income. So, he passed on the other side to avoid the problem of identifying the man.
- v32 A Levite who was not as high as the priest in the standing of society came to the place and looked carefully at the man. He could have helped him but thought that the priest ahead of him should have done that, so he also passed by on the other side.
- v33 A hated Samaritan was the next person to arrive and when he saw the helpless man, he felt compassion.

v34 He bandaged the man's wounds pouring on oil and wine. He actually would have done it the other way, but Jesus is drawing attention to the act of the Samaritan who is treating this helpless man as though he was worshipping God. Pour is used in worship like Jacob poured oil on the altar. Wine would have to be used first to cleanse and disinfect the wounds followed by oil and the bandages. He placed the man on his own donkey. No easy task to lift a helpless man but humbling himself to do that and continuing to humble himself by walking in front of his donkey, while the man was being moved to a place of refuge so that he did not suffer any more.

v35 The next day he gave the innkeeper two denarii to cover the stay and promised to reimburse the man so that the injured man would be free to leave owing nothing.

v36 Jesus asked that of the three men, who had acted as a neighbour to the injured man?

v37 The law expert replied that it was the one who had mercy on him so Jesus told him to do the same when anyone in need crossed his path. In other words, your neighbour is a person in need who crosses your path. There is not a list that one can tick off.

Jesus Himself was once called a Samaritan by those opposed to His actions and teaching. He humbled Himself so that He could bring the helpless home to His Father's house. He paid the price so that the helpless could be free. He deals with everyone, one at a time because each one needs His special attention and He not only finds the person but restores him.

Just after telling the parable, Jesus went on His way with His disciples and came to the village where Martha welcomed Him into her home. That means providing Him and His disciples with a meal involving much hard work. Martha served but her sister Mary chose the option of listening to Jesus as He taught His disciples. Martha was taken up by all the preparation of the meal and told Jesus to tell her sister Mary to help her because she was doing all the work on her own. Martha was told by Jesus that she was distracted by many things whereas only one thing was important, and Mary had chosen that, and it would not be taken from her. Later when Jesus had concluded what He had to say, then all could get involved with Mary to provide the meal.

Jesus was applying the parable of the good Samaritan in that situation. He was meeting the need of Mary. An opportunity not to be missed.

THE BAD SAMARITAN

John 4:1-42

Jesus left Judea and returned once more to Galilee. To get to Galilee He had to pass through Samaria. The Samaritans were not popular with the Jews because they had been excluded by the Jews from participation in the building of the temple and had thrown human bones into the temple to defile it and were then banned from worship there. Rebellious Jews would find refuge in Samaria and the term Samaritan became associated with that of a rebel opposed to the religion and authorities of Israel. (Jesus Himself was called a Samaritan. Was it because He was critical of a lifestyle unrelated to the Word of God?)

This did not hinder Jesus from going through Samaria.



READ

John 4:1-4 A Samaritan Woman Meets Her Messiah

Jesus used the shortest route and walked with His disciples until He reached Sychar which is SE of Samaria city.

They arrived at the hottest time of the day and being tired, Jesus sat down at a well there. He sent His disciples into the village to buy bread so that He would be alone to talk to whomever He met. It was about noon when no one normally walks around because of the heat. The ground in that area is almost white and very barren. It is interesting that the disciples did not tell the people in the village about their Master, perhaps they only thought of food, whereas Jesus was concerned about people.

He was all alone when a woman came out on her own from Sychar to draw water. It was clear she was ashamed to come with the other women at a cooler time of the day. Possibly the fact that she had had five husbands made her an object of ridicule and laughter. It was a One-on-one meeting. The best time to speak to someone about personal salvation.



READ

John 4:5-15

Jesus asked her for water to drink. Why did He do that? Perhaps He used that as a way of starting a conversation with the woman? Surely the obvious answer is that He was thirsty and needed a drink of cold water. We do not need to look for profound answers or clever ways to gain the attention of people. Just be yourself and be normal and if the Lord is active, He will quite naturally cause the conversation to turn towards eternal values.

Jesus was a real man. He got tired, He needed to sit down, He needed a drink of water and He revealed His lack of possessions because He had nothing to draw with to get Himself a drink of water.

The woman saw immediately that Jesus was a Jew. She was conscious of being a woman, and a Samaritan. The past still lived in the present in the life of this woman. Her past made her life one of shame and loneliness and the past history of the Jews and Samaritans immediately created a barrier in interaction. Jesus forgot about the drink and so did the woman and immediately turned to her need of Himself. Jesus said: If you knew the gift of God, who is the Holy Spirit who is given by the Father to those who ask Him, she would ask Him, and He would give her living water. This water would result in eternal life and would satisfy every spiritual thirst.

What was the gift of God? Jesus Himself. God so loved the world He gave His only Son. Salvation and eternal life are also gifts, which come when receiving Jesus, the gift of God. Of course, the woman did not know anything about this man, so Jesus was causing her to deal directly with Himself to ask Him for living water. The woman thought He was talking about the water that comes freshly out of the well. She saw Jesus had no way He could get at that water. Clearly the conversation was not going too well because of their different cultures and Jesus' poverty and obvious limitations to do what He said. Yet she asked Him where He would get that living water from because it certainly was not in that well!

This woman had some insight (from God) because although she saw a poor Jew, she asked if He was greater than their father Jacob who gave them that well and drank from it himself.

Jesus' words must have gone right inside the woman's inner being. Jesus revealed His greatness to the woman that anyone who drank from Jacob's well would have to return to it again and again but that the water He gave a person would cause him never to thirst again but would become a spring of water resulting in eternal life for that person. The water Jesus gives is Himself. The water He gave would also help whoever drank to help others who are thirsty and result in their experiencing everlasting life.

The woman saw the end of her life of shame and loneliness because if she drank the water Jesus gave, she would never have to come to the well in her shame. She would never thirst again. Was she a woman who thought that finding the right man would satisfy her spiritual needs until she realised that marriage was not the answer and so she just lived with a man until she met this man?

She asked Jesus to give her the water He had so that she would never thirst or have to return to Jacob's well again. Jesus had to remind her again why she was on her own and did not want to draw water at that well with others. He could only give living water to people who realised they had a spiritual need, a need to be forgiven.



READ

John 4:16-26

Jesus suddenly changed the subject and said "Go call your husband."

She replied that she had no husband. Jesus agreed that that was the truth, but He then went on to tell her that she had had five husbands and the man with her was not her husband. Why did Jesus go into such detail? He was not condemning her, He was simply stating the facts He already knew and told her about the details of her life. Why? Because the Samaritans believed that when the Messiah came, He would reveal everything to them. So Jesus showed that He was the Messiah without mentioning the word. Jesus told her everything about herself to meet her at her point of expectation. He is the Messiah, but He also revealed Himself and His ability to change lives. Jesus deals with each person at their point of expectation. That is why we need the Lord to help us say the right words and ask the right questions because the expectations of everyone are different.

Immediately Jesus has touched a sore point in her life, the reason for her shame and she tries to change the subject. The woman did not like this stranger revealing all the details so she quickly became religious and she acknowledged Jesus as a prophet and wanted to change the conversation to a religious discussion about where was the right place to worship: at Mt Gerizim as the Samaritans did or in Jerusalem as the Jews did? That had been argued for years and it was one way of getting off a touchy subject which embarrassed her. Jesus takes up her concern for a place of worship and states clearly that the place where people worship the Father will no longer be important to God. No nation is favoured more than another. Salvation is for all that the Father draws to the Son. Jesus emphasises the revelation of God through the Scriptures given to the Jews and says that the hour has arrived when true worship of the Father will be in spirit and in truth. The place is not important, but the method is. Ritual is meaningless. The Spirit of God witnesses with our spirit and enables us to worship God according to the truth revealed in the Bible. God is Spirit.

Suddenly the woman realises that this Man has told her everything! He has told her about her past and shown her how to worship God in the present and the future. Could this man be the Messiah they were expecting?

Jesus revealed Himself directly to only a few but He said to this woman, “I who speak to you am He.” I am the Messiah.

Still no drink of water. She even forgot her water pot at the well and rushed off to the town. Joy must have flooded her being, she could not keep the good news to herself and had to tell the men in the town, to come and hear a man who had told her everything about herself and asked them if this could indeed be the Christ, the Messiah they were expecting. When anyone comes to Jesus and is forgiven, the evidence of a new creation is a desire to make Jesus known to others. One cannot keep quiet.

Why did she tell the men and not the women? They were the key to reaching the whole town. If they were also convinced of the truth, they would spread the message rapidly to their families.



READ

John 4:27-38 The Whiteness Harvest

The disciples came back to the well and saw Jesus alone with the woman and were amazed that He talked alone with her, yet nobody questioned His motives. Jesus was above suspicion because of His previous behaviour.

The disciples had already eaten some of the bread they had bought at a higher price than usual because they were Jews buying from Samaritans! They arrived and urged Him to eat some bread, but He declined because He was expecting a response from the village and was waiting for the people to come and see Him. The men of the town came out to Jesus. He saw their need and forgot about His own. His physical needs were subject to the control of His spirit.

He spoke of food which is normally taken in to meet the needs of the body but in His case, He saw the greater need of satisfying the requirements of His Father who sent Him and to complete that task which was to seek and save that which was lost. Jesus says that when we invite Him into our lives, He will eat with us conveying to us the will of the Father which is what His food is.

He told His disciples that His food was to do the will of His Father who sent Him and to finish His work. Jesus focuses on that which is important in life. The disciples considered eating as important but failed to see the needs of the people in the town. Clearly, they had not spoken to anyone

there about their Master. Jesus saw the people as more important than His own physical needs or that of His disciples. Those needs would be met once the spiritual needs of the people had been satisfied. He told them to look at the fields that were ripe for harvest because He could see a crowd coming to Him from the village. He was saying to His disciples that the harvest was people that had been sown by many before Him and that now was the time for harvest. Others have done the hard work and it is time for them to reap.

He encourages reaping so that both they who sow the Word of God and those who reap may share in the rejoicing in the gathering of souls for eternal life. Some sow and others reap but God gives the increase. Those who reap enter into the labours of those who faithfully sowed in the past.



READ

John 4:39-42 The Saviour of the World

The Samaritan woman put the disciples to shame as she wasted no time in spreading the news. She sowed the seed and the people of the town believed because of her testimony that Jesus told her everything that she had ever done. They too were expecting One who would reveal everything to them. The Samaritans urged Jesus to stay with them. They insisted that He stay with them. They made Him feel welcome and so He stayed two days. The Samaritans listened to this Jew and listened well and knew with certainty that Jesus was the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. The woman had sowed well. She took the trouble to talk to the men and gave her testimony. When the people heard for themselves, Jesus reaped the harvest and she would increase in her joy.

Jesus encourages us to behave normally but to make spiritual needs of others our priority before we consider our own. In our personal witness we must keep the focus upon Jesus Himself which is what He did. Opportunities will come in the normal course of events, but we must be prepared to speak and get involved like the Samaritan woman and not like the disciples who lost an opening because they were concerned about food.

Later Philip the evangelist in the Acts went to Samaria and was greatly used by God. Peter went there afterwards and through him the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Samaritans. This was important because if he had not done so, there would have been a division in the church. The Holy Spirit came upon the Jews, through the preaching of Peter, and the Samaritans, and the Gentiles as he spoke to Cornelius and other Gentiles.

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Acts 8



READ

Acts 8:1-3 Saul Persecutes the Church

After the martyrdom of Stephen, further persecution followed causing the followers of Jesus to scatter and preach the message of salvation.



READ

Acts 8:4-8 Christ is Preached in Samaria

Philip had a Greek name and was a Greek speaking Jew. He was respected, full of the Spirit and wise, and he went to other non-Jews in the city of Samaria and preached Christ.

He was one of the seven, full of the Spirit and chosen to serve. He went to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there, adapting his message according to the expectations of the Samaritans who were anticipating the Messiah who would tell them all things. Word would have spread in the area about Jesus' meeting with the woman and the people of Sychar and so Philip went to a people prepared. So, they heard Philip and saw the power of God in action as people were healed and evil spirits cast out resulting in great joy in the city. The message was focused on the person of the Christ. The result of the experience of changed lives and the evidence of the power of God in the restoration of the demon-possessed, liberty of movement for the paralysed and people being able to walk again or move their limbs.



READ

Acts 8:9-25 The Sorcerer's Sin

A man called Simon had previously had the acclaim of the people through his acts involving the spirit world, but he never changed lives. He rose in esteem. Philip preached about the rule of God in the lives of people made possible through Jesus Christ and it resulted in people taking a step of proclaiming through baptism that they were His followers.

When the apostles heard the people of Samaria had accepted the Word of God, Peter and John were sent and when they laid their hands on them the people received the Holy Spirit. Thereafter the two apostles preached in many of the Samaritan villages. Had the Holy Spirit been given through the preaching of Philip only, there was the danger of schism but nothing like that happened because Peter was given the keys to open the way to

Salvation for Jew, Samaritan and Gentile and it is through Him that the Holy Spirit enters the people of Samaria. Yet John was also there as a confirming witness.

Simon lost his position in his society. He thought he could be restored to his position of greatness by offering to buy the right to give the Holy Spirit to others by the laying on of his hands. Simon had authority in the past for his acts of sorcery, and now he wanted to buy even more power. Peter told him that his heart was not right with God and encouraged him to humble himself and turn away from that thought and lifestyle of using money to do the work of God. Peter recognised that Simon was still enslaved by the powers he once used for his own ends. People who delve into the occult do not gain deliverance through a casual superficial repentance and belief. Their enslavement requires a deep work of the death of Christ to root out the grip of the devil. Simon was frightened by the truth and realised the need of the prayers of others. Peter and John returned to Jerusalem preaching in the Samaritan villages on their way back.



READ

Acts 8:26-40 Christ is Preached to an Ethiopian

Philip the evangelist was able to see the results of his preaching before an angel of the Lord told him to go to a deserted area south of Jerusalem, to the road which led to Gaza. It is very hot and dry there and few liked to go there unless they had to. Philip did not argue that Samaria had lots of people while few would be in a hot deserted road.

On arrival, Philip saw an Ethiopian eunuch, the minister of finance of Candace queen of Ethiopia, on his way back after worshipping the Lord in Jerusalem. He was reading the prophecy of Isaiah, probably in Greek, while he sat in his chariot which must have been quite impressive for it had a driver and places for at least two passengers. The Spirit told Philip who spoke Greek to overtake the chariot. This would mean that Philip would have to run and humble himself as running is a shame for an “old man”. Philip could have said that his culture requires him to walk sedately down the road. The Spirit is in fact telling him to go contrary to his culture and expectations.

So, Philip ran. What would have happened if he had been disobedient? The Ethiopian would have read on to Isaiah 54 which is about a barren one who has never had children. Philip would have had to say that he was reading about himself. We must obey God because He works at both ends at the same time. His timing is perfect.

Philip needed to gain acceptance and a willingness for the Ethiopian to want his help. He asked him if he understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian asked how he could unless someone explained it to him. So, he asked Philip to join him in the chariot. We need to wait for people to invite us. Like Jesus, we cannot intrude or force the issue. We have to rely on the Spirit to do His work in preparing hearts.

They read **Isaiah 53:7-8** together, written about 700 years before the coming of the Messiah. **He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of My people was He stricken.**

The Ethiopian asked Philip if Isaiah was talking about himself or some other man. Philip opened his mouth. You will say that is obvious yet there are many who learn a foreign language but who are scared to open their mouths lest they make a mistake and lose face. Others keep their mouths closed through excuses that it was not their calling. The Samaritan woman simply gave her testimony and put the twelve theological students who never said a word to shame.

Philip started with that passage and preached Jesus to the Ethiopian. Note how he adapted the same message. Messiah to the Samaritans but Jesus to the Ethiopian. Our message is the same to all, but we do not treat people like an assembly line. We need the Holy Spirit to help us reach people according to their expectations. An instant convert! God works quickly.

The chariot arrived at some water and the Ethiopian wanted to be baptised in front of his entourage. The chariot came to a stop, both went into the water and Philip baptised him. When they emerged from the water the Spirit took Philip away as the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing.

How did Luke know that? Years later he met people from Ethiopia who arrived in Jerusalem and told him about the incident on the road to Gaza. News spread in Ethiopia and many others returned to Jerusalem to find out more about this Jesus.

JESUS' WAY OF PRAYING

Luke 11:1-13

A parable is Jesus' method of teaching us the truths He wants to convey. He only explained them to those who asked Him. Stories stay longer in the minds of people.



READ

Luke 11:1-4 The Model Prayer

Jesus usually prayed on His own, away from the disciples. They only disturbed Him when He stopped praying. One of His disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray as John taught his disciples. Interesting is it not that a disciple asked Him to teach them. Jesus waited for that. I have discovered that when I have asked the Lord for insight, He responds.

Matthew 11:25 Jesus said, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”

I come as a child and ask for insight and I discover fresh truths in well-known verses.

Jesus taught them a short prayer. He knew that words were insufficient and that what was needed was confidence that the prayer would be heard and answered. Repetition of words do not result in much expectation.

Our Father in Heaven. A father in the Middle East is the most important member of a family. Nothing is done without his approval. To get married you first consult your father and ask him to arrange a spouse for you. Before embarking on a career or starting a business, you first consult your father. So, to call God “Father” means that you are acknowledging that God has the final say in your life. **Proverbs 3:6** **In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.** Note: you only use the word “Father” once, not with endless repetition.

Jesus taught much about God being the Father and that He was the only way for us to know that God was our Father. Ignore Him and you will have to deal with God as your judge. **John 3:36** **He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**

John 14:6 reminds that **Jesus said: I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.** People think that there are many ways to God, but they are sadly and tragically mistaken because when they

finally meet God as their judge, they will have no advocate, no mediator, no high priest. In fact, they will come face to face with Jesus Christ.

When we trust in Jesus dealing with our sin and rebellion by His death on the Cross, we experience God as our Father. The problem of our going our own way has been removed by Jesus taking our punishment. Thus, to know God as Father means that in your case the sin question has been dealt with and there is nothing to separate you from your Father. The Father does not find fault with us because Jesus dealt with that. The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son. That is why we can come boldly to the Father in prayer. There is no separation caused by sin.

Hallowed be Thy name. The children would be concerned about the reputation of their father. They would make sure that nothing they did or said brought shame to the father. They would protect his name. They would not keep quiet when others slandered him. They would make known his character and his actions while dealing with people. So, we are saying “I will make sure that nothing I do or say will bring shame to the name of the Father in heaven.”

Thy kingdom come. The family will want to extend the area owned by the father and it's the responsibility of the sons to provide for their parents and enlarge the family estate. “Thy kingdom come” means I must get involved and see to it that the area that my Father controls grows so that it becomes a reality in our lives here on earth.

Your will be done. A father has the final say in any decision. What he decides is done. All must be involved in the carrying out of the father's will. Only those who belong to the Father and know Him as Father can pray like this. Only if your sins have been forgiven through the death of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is living in you, enabling you to have liberty in prayer because you come, not out of fear, but out of respect and gratitude for what the Father has done for you by providing a substitute in your place.

Give us each day our daily bread. It is admitting we need the Father's provision every day. Every day, food has to be fresh. The Father knows our needs before we do. There is no anxiety and concern about tomorrow.

Forgive us our sins for we forgive everyone who sins against us. Treat us as we treat others. Deal with me as I deal with others. Forgive me as I forgive others. Forgive and forget. We should be specific, but sadly, we are not aware of the many ways and times we fall short of doing the will of the Father.

Do not allow us to fall in temptation. We should avoid places of temptation. Our old sinful nature is used by the evil one to respond to please that nature. We have to deal with the kingdom of darkness.

Note that:

- The prayer is short.
- There is an important element of faith.
- There must be a sense of expecting the Father to hear and answer.
- Jesus causes people to be bold in prayer because they have a relationship with the Father.

The Lord's Prayer is memorised and repeated often. For many it is just words, so Jesus knew He had to teach them more about prayer and He does so with another parable.



READ

Luke 11:5-8 A Friend Comes at Midnight

Jesus had to give them a sense of confidence that their prayer would be answered. To build up their faith, Jesus asked a question. In fact, verses 5-7 are all one question and it begins with a question that requires a definite answer: "Which of you...?" The same words are used by Jesus in

Luke 14:5 Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?"

Luke 15:4 What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?

Luke 17:7 And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, "Come at once and sit down to eat"?

In Luke 11:5-7 Jesus is expecting a definite no. Not one of us will be refused a request. Why not? A stranger has arrived at this village and been welcomed into a home. The host was unprepared and does not have food to provide a large meal to show his generosity. So, he excuses himself and goes to a neighbour. Does he knock? No. Who knocks? A stranger. Who calls out? A friend. How many times does he call out? Only once. What does he ask for? Three loaves of bread. The spoon of the meal, the smallest part. Imagine a man coming to you at midnight and asking for bread. Outrageous. No lack of confidence on his part.

Think about the situation. It is a one-roomed house. The section where they are sleeping is on the upper section of the room and the lower section has the area for the animals. Mattresses have been rolled out and the family is sleeping all together behind a locked door. To open the door the family would have to get up and move the mattresses and their nights' sleep will be disturbed. Will he refuse to give him anything? NO! The name of the whole village is at stake. His own name would be in question. He will not get up and give him the bread but he does provide what he needs, because he is his friend and because of his *anaideia* (a Greek word which comes from *Aidws* meaning "shame", add the prefix "a" to it to mean the opposite of shame, it means not wanting to be ashamed.) Who does this apply to? The man on the inside or the man on the outside? I personally prefer the idea that it refers to both. The man on the inside does not want to be ashamed and known as baxiil (stingy) and so gives the man as much as he needs, not just the bread but the meat, milk, vegetables and wine so the man on the outside will entertain his guest and not be ashamed. Both men do not want to be ashamed. God answers our prayers because He acts for the sake of His name and He also does not want His children to be ashamed. The relationship is all important. Preserving their good name.

There are a few lessons from the parable:

- God answers our prayers as a result of our confidence in Him. Many translations use the word persistence, but the man only asked once and waited with expectancy.
- God answers our prayers for the sake of His Name so that we will continue to approach Him with boldness and expect Him to act for His Name's sake. He leads us in the path of righteousness for His Name's sake.
- God honours those who honour Him. Their name by which they are known as belonging to His family and knowing Him as Father is at stake.



READ

Luke 11:9-13 Keep Asking, Seeking, Knocking

Keep on asking and you will receive, keep on seeking and you will find, keep on knocking and it will be opened to you. Jesus is teaching that we must persist. But He has taught that we are not to heap up words and repeat ourselves like the heathens. He then gives three parables to illustrate His teaching.

The son asks for:

- Bread, which is round and flat like a stone.
- A Fish, an eel is serpent-like.

- A Scorpion, when rolled up takes on the oval shape of an egg.

What would your children think of you? Would you only give that which will do them good? The son asks for bread, fish, and an egg – these are for different needs, and he does not keep on saying the same thing over and over. Note how the prayer requests are specific and short.

We respond to the needs of our children out of love. We are thinking of their welfare and want them to respect us and have the liberty to keep on asking us to meet their needs.

In verse 13, Jesus points out that in prayer we need the Holy Spirit. We need to know what to pray for and how to pray. Very often we use the same words and expressions because we are not realising our need of the Holy Spirit in prayer.

How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them who ask Him. Why will He do that? It is the Holy Spirit of truth that reveals the Father and the Son and all the Scriptures.

Only the Father gives the Holy Spirit when the temple of your body has been cleansed by faith in Jesus' death for the arrival of the Holy Spirit to take His place in your heart. He does not act on His own but what the Father and the Son tell Him, He passes on to us.

THE BONUS TEST

Luke 12:13-21

Jesus urged His disciples not to be anxious. Society through insurance and pension schemes tries to provide for every circumstance so that we don't need to rely on God. Seek His Kingdom and all the needs of food, clothing and shelter will be provided.



READ

Luke 12:13-21 The Parable of the Rich Fool

- v13 The rabbis taught that if one member of the family requested a division of the property, it should be given him. As Jesus was regarded as a rabbi or teacher, a person called out to Him to tell his brother to divide the estate with him. He is trying to use Jesus to get his way.
- v14 Jesus reproved him calling him 'man' and asked him who had appointed Him to arbitrate between the brothers. Jesus knew that if the man got his own way, he would lose his brother and Jesus preferred to keep the family together.
- v15 A general principle for people is to be on their guard against the desire for more because a person's life is not made up by the abundance of possessions. Everyone has a desire for more and unless we are aware of it, it will take control of us. Advertisements give the impression that to have an abundance of possessions will lead to abundance of life whereas Jesus said He had come to bring life and do so in abundance.
- v16 Jesus spoke about the quality of life and recognising the desire for more was in everyone. He then told a parable to show that those desires could be channelled in a different way.
- v17 The ground of a rich man yielded an unexpected bumper harvest. The rich man did not expect it because he did not have the barns to store the crop. It was the bonus test. He was being tested as to what he would do with that harvest. He should have consulted his family or gone to the local coffee shop and spent time discussing it with the locals. He could have given it to others and discovered the blessing of giving more than receiving. **Proverbs 15:22 Without advice plans go astray but with many counsellors they will succeed.**
- v18 He thought for a long time before he alone made his decision. He failed the bonus test which God set him to see what he would do. If he used it to help others in need, he would discover the truth of Jesus that it

was more blessed to give than receive. It would have given him more pleasure than the bonus crop. He would also have pleased God who loves a cheerful giver. The rich man thought that his abundance would bring him pleasure but God called him a fool. **Psalm 14:1 The fool says in his heart there is no God.** This rich man acted as though there was no God and he would not have to give an account to Him or be held responsible for his actions. To have a great deal of money for a lifetime instead of investing it in bringing people to an eternal relationship with the eternal God would classify that man as having made a poor investment that he would leave behind, never to see again.

God does not act immediately but waits until the man has carried out his plans. God gave him time as he broke down the old barns and rebuilt larger barns. He had time to change his mind and share with the needy but when all his planned provision was complete, God acted.

v20 God gives us a great deal of time to switch investments and change our priorities and outlook on life. None of us will be able to say that there was not enough time. We never seem to have enough time. Many years ago, there was a tract of excuses in the life of a person.

A baby too young,
A boy too joyful,
A student too studious,
A married couple too happy,
A businessman too busy,
An old man too old,
A tombstone too late.

God called him a fool and told him that his soul would be required because he had been given enough time. He had failed the test and would lose the bonus crop and have no control over it because it would happen so quickly. He was asked a question but was speechless. You too have within you a desire for more which could take control of you, or you could use that desire to establish the kingdom of God.

v21 We cannot enrich God. **Romans 11:35 No one has given first to God that He should repay him.** Everything belongs to God. The desire to get more could be directed to make gifts available to God as they belonged to Him to begin with. He tests you to see what use you will make of what He gives you. We lose what we spend on ourselves but retain for eternity what we return to God.

Matthew 6:21 Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

BE READY

Luke 12:35-48

Jesus urged His disciples to be ready for anything, to be alive and attentive all the time. Never to take a spiritual holiday but to remain on guard no matter how much you have been blessed in the past or how much the Lord has already used you. The need is to be ready now. The Lord will come for His servants individually for none of us knows the number of days ordained for us. Jesus is emphasizing the need to be ready all the time.



READ

Luke 12:35-48 The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant

v35 Both ladies and men wear robes that reach down to the ground covering the feet. Should there be a need for hasty action, they tuck their robe into a belt around the waist, so it is lifted off the ground.

A lamp is kept burning in the home at night giving off a dim light so that should there be a need to act it can be done without delay. It is also an indication there is life in the home. The wick needs to be kept clean so that it does not produce smoke but burns brightly.

v36 The servants are waiting for their master to return from a wedding. They could not attend, and they did not know how long he would take to return. He would come back without warning. He had left them in charge of his affairs because he trusted them. On his arrival they would open immediately as though he had always been there.

We live in the presence of God and our every thought and action is known. A watchful servant is one who is conscious of that fact.

v37 Those that open immediately on his return will be blessed. They would receive something they never expected. Their only thought was to be worthy servants of a great master to show by their actions they were watchful all the time. The master tucked up his own robe into his belt and prepared himself while he got his servants to sit while he served them. Servants usually remain servants but when the master serves them, he is actually treating them like his sons. The master elevated them to the position of members of his family for their faithfulness.

v38 The Romans divided the night into four watches but the Jews into three. Jesus said the servants would be blessed as they stayed awake keeping their lamps burning. He said the same thing twice in two ways to confirm that servants who stayed on guard would be blessed.

v39 Jesus now focuses their attention on the master of the house. Had he known when the thief would arrive, he would have stayed awake and not allowed the thief to break in. The disciples must be ready, for the Son of Man is returning at an hour they do not expect. This could refer to the return of Jesus. All the disciples died long before His return, but He was stressing the need to remain alert spiritually.

v41 Peter asked Jesus if He had told that parable only to His disciples or to all people. Jesus did not answer but left him to come to his own conclusions after He had told them part two on the same subject.

v42 Jesus asks who that faithful and wise servant is to whom the master will make ruler over his household. Jesus speaks about two servants. The master trusted his servant to provide for other members of the household while he was absent. Followers of Jesus Christ are required to carry on doing the work He has given them for as long as is possible. Called to be faithful. The servant knows the master could return at any moment and lives in anticipation of that event.

v43 The servant who is still active doing his master's will at the time of his return, will be blessed, for his master will elevate him to the position of manager over all he had. No longer a servant.

v45 If the servant reckoned that his master would not return for a long time and lived only for himself by abusing his master's property and seeing only to his own needs, the master would come at an hour he did not expect. He would be cut in two because he served with a divided heart and two masters. He would lose all and share the experience of those who had no relationship with his master. Every day must be seen as the day of the return of our Lord and we must remain alert and actively doing His will.

v47 The servant would be dealt with according to the light he had received. The greater the knowledge of the will of God, the greater the responsibility and accountability. To whom much is given, of him much is required. The knowledge of the will of God is intended for practical obedience to the growth of the disciple and those who learn from him.

A missionary asked his students what they would do if they only had one week to live. Each spoke of great evangelistic efforts and all-out sharing of Salvation in Christ. When asked what he would do, he said he would go on living as though it was his last day. That missionary died unexpectedly one day, still doing the will of God. His Master had come for him

INVITATION TO SHARE LIFE

Luke 14:1-24



READ

Luke 14:1-11 A Man with Dropsy Healed on the Sabbath

One day a school had a Christmas celebration and invited the parents. A well-known actor, a parent, arrived and went and sat right in front of the stage to be near his child. The organiser had the difficult task of asking him to sit further back because those seats had been reserved for important people. He became very angry because he was treated like everyone else and lost face.

Jesus noted that people who were invited to a meal chose the best places. Where would they be? Near the host because he was both wealthy and worthy. When invited to a wedding feast, Jesus said that people should not choose the best places lest they be told that it was for someone else and they would lose face and be ashamed when asked to sit further away from the host. Rather, Jesus said, choose the lowest place, the one nearest the door and far from the host. Then when the host invites you to move up higher or closer to the host, you will be honoured by the way the host treats you and all will take note of that.

Luke 14:11 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Jesus states this again in **Luke 18:14** after the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. To be exalted means in the Bible to be drawn closer to God. The Corinthians were exalted or brought closer to God through the preaching of the good news of salvation. God exalts us by drawing us closer to Himself in due time when we humble ourselves.

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.

If a person exalts himself, he considers himself worthy to be near God. He does not realize the need of a sinner to be forgiven and have the righteousness of God before he can enjoy the company of the Father. Most of the people in the world think that they must earn their way to God through giving money and being religious. They think they will be able to say to God all the things they have done for Him.

Matthew 7:22-23 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Whoever exalts himself or considers himself worthy of being in the presence of God will be humbled. That means he will be sent far from the presence of God. To a place separated from God by a great gulf that is fixed.

However if a person humbles himself, considers himself unworthy, deserving to go to hell and confesses that he cannot rectify the situation except to cry out to God to include him in the provision God has already made for our salvation, then that person will be exalted or drawn closer to the presence of God. Jesus said that He would be the way to the Father. Jesus said that He had come to seek and save that which was lost. He also said that He had not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Jesus cannot help a person who thinks he is good enough.

I asked a person why God would accept him into heaven. He listed all the good that he had done. I told him that if that were sufficient then the death of Jesus was a waste of time. He was dumbfounded. God would not compare him with me but him with Jesus. That is why all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Many have not considered that should good works be the way to heaven, then heaven would be a place where everyone would be talking about their deeds. It would be hell.

Jesus spoke to His host and told him not to invite his relatives, friends or rich neighbours because they would invite him back and he would lose his eternal reward. But he should invite the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. People that no-one ever invites because they are so needy and helpless and cannot repay.

God would repay the host for his acts of kindness. Therefore, he must make it his aim to please God and from God receive his reward.

One of those reclining at the table with Jesus, on hearing that God would repay for acts of kindness, told Jesus that the man who shared life with God in eternity would be really happy or blessed. In those days and today, man has not changed. He thinks eternity with God depends on what we do for God while we are alive.

Jesus corrects that false idea through a parable.



READ

Luke 14:12-24 The Parable of the Great Supper

A certain man gave a great supper and invited many. He would have invited the rich, the noble, the worthy neighbours because they would later have invited him. The meal would have taken place at 3 p.m. after most of the work of the day was done and it was no longer as warm and there was

also time to eat, talk and return home before dark. On the basis of the response to his invitation, he prepared mountains of food to show his generosity by what was left over. They were polite and accepted his invitation.

At supper time he sent out a second invitation to those he considered worthy. **“Come for all things are now ready.”** All they had to do was come. No need to bring anything. This is the invitation of Jesus because later He reveals that He is the host of the great supper. On the Cross Jesus said, **“It is finished.”** I have done everything that is required for the salvation of every man, woman and child.

Sin had to be punished. The soul that sins shall die. Jesus the sinless One died. God’s wrath had to be assuaged.

Isaiah 59:16 He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Man was separated from God. Jesus even took our separation. He said **“My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?”** All we have to do is come and receive salvation as a gift, eternal life as a gift, righteousness as a gift. We must realise it is for me. I need Him because I am the sinner.

The servant is told to go quickly. Salvation happens quickly. You do not drift into a state of salvation. Like marriage, it is an act of the will. It is a work of God and when He works, He acts quickly.

The servant came back after acting as the bearer of good news. Not one person responded. There were three excuses which represent all excuses.

v18 The first one said, **“I have bought a piece of ground and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.”** This is obviously a lie because one never buys a field without first seeing it. He is polite and turns down the invitation at the last moment. It is a great insult to the host and shows that **he values his business more than his relationship with the host.**

v19 The second one said, **“I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them.”** Another lie because one never buys oxen before seeing them in action. He has not enough time to try so many in such a short time. **He values his possessions more than his relationship with the host.** He is also polite. He is also going to hell.

v20The third one said **“I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”** That sounds reasonable. However, the host of the great banquet would never think of competing with a wedding feast in the village. **The guest valued a woman above a man** and at that time in the afternoon. He is also telling a lie and is not even polite.

Why did they turn down the invitation at the last moment? Was it out of envy and to show him they were just as important? The host would have everything ready, but the place would be empty. Each one valued their business, their possessions, their family more than their relationship with the host, thus showing that all excuses were covered, but none were acceptable to the host.

Each one insulted the host by turning down the invitation at the last moment. The first two were polite. There will be many polite, respectable people in hell because they did not value what God has provided for them.

The host became angry. Note that the servant was only a messenger who carried the message. He was not blamed for the poor response nor praised that the house was full. The host had done everything to make that possible.

The host expressed His anger by inviting the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. In other words, people who never thought they would be invited, who could never repay, who could bring nothing, who would forever praise the Host for His kindness and love for inviting them, who would be brought into a relationship with Him that would endure for eternity.

- Why the poor? Because they are too poor to use the excuse that they had bought a field or oxen.
- Why the crippled? Because they cannot say they had bought oxen and needed to try them out.
- Why the blind? They cannot see the field they had bought.
- Why the lame? Because no one would marry them

A people who do not offer excuses will respond and enjoy the company of the host and his abundant provision. They took the place of those who were considered more worthy. Imagine the horror of a person in eternity seeing heaven from a distance and those he despised taking his place because he did not value his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not there and would never be because of a great gulf fixed.

The servant reported that there was still room, so the host told him to go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in. These are

Gentiles; people that have no relationship with the host. They do not belong to the area. They will offer reasons for not responding to the invitation. These are not excuses, for they are ignorant and need clarification. We have no relationship with your master. Is there a place for me? Is there enough food? We have nothing to bring. We are not worthy. We have done nothing to deserve to be with your master.

The servant is to compel them, urge them, to keep on explaining so that they too are without excuse. He will say to them, “Respond to my Master’s invitation and you will have a relationship with Him. There is a place for you and abundance of provision to meet your every need. My Master is generous and has no favourites. No need to bring anything except yourselves because it is a gift from my Master.”

Jesus said in verse 24 **“I say to you (plural) that none of those who were first invited will taste My provision.”** He Himself is the host of the great banquet. His house will be full. No empty places. No one will be missing. The elect will be gathered from all over the world. Will you be there? Have you responded to the invitation? Do you have a relationship of gratitude with the Lord Jesus?

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Jesus wants to share a meal with us on a daily basis. He wants to share life and waits for our invitation for Him to be involved in all the details of our lives. He eats with us to reveal the will of the Father for our lives. Only the doing of that will is acceptable to the Father.

What is your excuse? Why have you never responded to the invitation? If you had, your whole life would have changed direction. You would never have been the same. Is your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ the most important priority in your life? You will one day have to answer to Him for all your actions.

YOU OWE US NOTHING

Luke 17:5-10



READ

Luke 17:5-10 Faith and Duty

- v5 The disciples asked the Lord Jesus to increase their faith but that is something He could not do. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. The reason why faith does not grow is because people fail to exercise it. Everyone has faith. We exercise it every time we sit in a chair. God gives saving faith but requires us to exercise it. Use it or lose it.
- v6 Jesus told them that if they used the faith, they had then great things would follow. Jesus knows that the faith of the disciples will grow when they see God at work and as they live in obedience to Himself. They will see God answering their requests and intervening on their behalf while working out His own purposes, but He also knows that there is the great danger of pride. Should God use you and there is the evidence of the power of God and miracles through the proclamation of the Gospel and the exercising of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the danger lurks that the servant thinks that he has become a person of importance, that his position has been elevated and that he is no longer on a level with his fellow servants who have been saved by grace through faith.
- With this in mind, Jesus tells a parable.
- v7 If you have done everything that you were told to do and you did it well, would it be honest if you said that you were an unworthy servant? Would it not be a form of mock humility? Jesus asked a question with a strong message requiring a definite answer.
- v8 The answer He is expecting is that no matter how long a servant serves, or how hard he works, he retains his role as a servant and is never elevated to the position of the master. One can never be familiar with God. He is God and you are His child. The saving of a soul is wholly His doing. One may sow and another may reap but God gives the increase. He will not share His glory with another.
- v9 Does the master thank the servant for what he did? Does the master owe anything to his servant because he did what he was told to do? Of course not. The Bible teaches that everything belongs to Him so if anything is given to God it belonged to Him in the first place. **Romans**

11:35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? He owes us nothing.

When we have done everything, we were told to do, we should say that we were “Achreios” servants. This word means “miserable” when referring to people and “useless” when referring to things.

When we have done everything, we were told to do, we should say that we are only servants and that what we had done pales into insignificance compared with what God has done for us. He owes us nothing.

No place for mock humility only gratitude to have the honour of being in His service and allowing Him to use us as He chooses.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

Luke 18:9-14

Jesus is not advocating repetition but rather perseverance in prayer. To prevent wrong understanding of what He has said, He tells three short parables. Note that the three parables teach prayers to be specific and not long winded.

The Lord Jesus never used the terms of grace, justification, sanctification, adoption, redemption, role of the advocate, because He said that His disciples were not ready to understand those things but later the Holy Spirit would reveal the meaning of those words and explain in detail.

John 16:12 I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

The people in the crowd around Jesus trusted in their efforts to gain acceptance with God and looked down on the lifestyle of others. The majority of people think like this today. They believe that:

- by living respectable lives,
 - by giving to charities,
 - they are doing God a favour by going to church on Christmas and Easter but not becoming too fanatical about religion because it is a private matter,
 - they must not be too different from the crowd,
 - supporting the same cricket or rugby team,
- will make them to be seen as a jolly good fellow!



READ

Luke 18:9-14 The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

v9 Jesus saw that some people were aware of their self-righteous way of life and looked down on everyone else, so He told a parable.

v10 The Pharisee belonged to a strict sect called “The Separated Ones” but were also known as the “chasidiim” or “loyal to God”. They were readily recognised by their robes and adhered to the Law in the minutest details adding over nine hundred of their own details to keep the Law. They avoided contact with the ordinary people so that they would not be unclean.

The Tax Collector was viewed by religious people as unclean because they dealt with unclean Gentile Romans who were classified as sinners as they did not have the revelation of the Law. They were known to

be corrupted by the money they handled and were seen as swindlers of the people.

Both went into the temple to pray. The Pharisee in the lead followed by the tax collector. The Temple was called by Jesus a house of worship, so both went to participate in the worship that took place after the sacrifice was offered for the sin of the people. Incense ascended to signify that the people could offer their individual prayers.

v11 The Pharisee prayed by himself. By himself in the Greek could either refer to his standing or his praying. As a Pharisee, he would have stood by himself so that the ordinary people would not contaminate him like the tax collector. He was acting on his own and did not get involved in the worship. He prayed aloud and it is not prayer but an advertisement to tell everyone what a righteous person he was. When we pray in public it should not be a time to preach the gospel and quote scripture but rather to talk to God.

He prayed, “God I thank You that I am not like other people who fail in life by stealing, swindling and sleeping around which this tax collector is probably guilty of.

v12 I fast twice a week and tithe everything that comes my way.” He is saying that he had not failed in the economic sphere nor in the domestic. He is “perfect”. The Pharisees’ righteousness in his own eyes was based on the fact that he did more than what was required. His prayer really was an attack on the tax collector because it fitted the ideas people had of the tax collector. Where did he get the idea of “adulterer”? Probably from his own mind like the elder brother of the prodigal. His righteousness was based on the fact that he did more than was required by God. The law taught that a man is only required to fast once a year and to tithe his olive oil, grain and new wine. He tithed everything so he carried out the law in detail and made his life a burden to carry every day. He also fasted twice a week which was so many more times than once a year as required on the Day of Atonement. Tithing and fasting did not make one righteous in the sight of God. We are not saved by works which we have done. Once we have been redeemed, we might tithe and fast out of gratitude, but it does not add to the finished work of Christ.

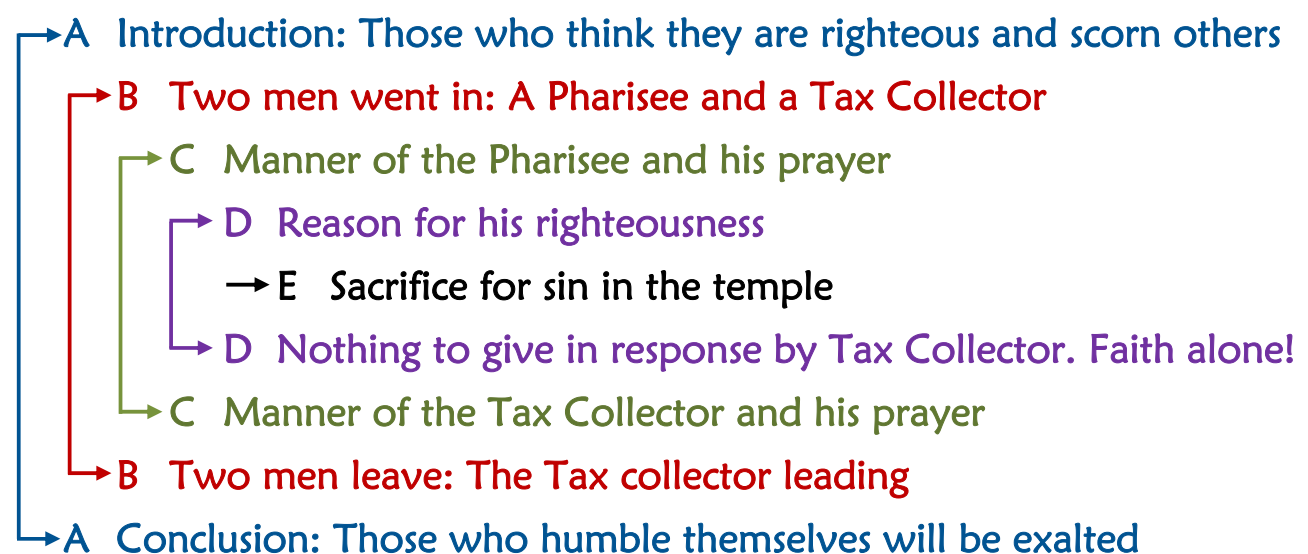
v13 The Tax Collector was also standing away from the group that were worshipping near the sacrifice of the lamb for their sins. He was aware that he was an unworthy sinner. He heard the words of the Pharisee

and felt condemned because he did not fast or tithe everything. He bowed his head because he felt so unworthy and beat upon his breast as a sign of sorrow and prayed, “God what is taking place upon that altar, let it include me. Because I am a sinner.” In [Luke 18:38](#) A blind man asked Jesus for mercy and Jesus asked him what he really wanted, to which he replied he wanted to see. Have mercy on me is vague. The tax collector did not use the same word but rather a Greek word “hilastheti” which has to do with offering an animal in place of a person for sins committed. His prayer included an act of faith in the way God had instituted in dealing with sin. No reference to others. Total unworthiness and total trust in God’s way alone. Many believe that Jesus died for our sins but have never then concluded that He died especially for them: **I am the sinner for whom He died.** I need Him. Jesus is the Saviour of all but especially of those that believe in Him.

v14 Jesus said that the Tax Collector and not the Pharisee went home justified or declared righteous in the sight of God. All who exalt themselves will be humbled or sent away from God while those who humble themselves will be exalted or drawn closer to God. People are drawn closer to God through the good news of Salvation. Three times the scriptures speak of exalting people. They are to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God who would exalt them in due time. Paul exalted his readers by preaching to them the Gospel and Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God after He had humbled Himself to the depths of death on the Cross.

Faith has to be exercised in God’s way of dealing with sin.

The structure of the parable is in such a way as to aid memorising it:



Jesus taught justification by faith alone. That we are not just forgiven but treated by the Father as though we have never sinned because we have the righteousness of Jesus who never sinned.

The Pharisee had wasted his time. Ritual, religion and complicated services while appealing to man's desire for religion, only makes him feel good. Thereafter he might feel God owes him. This is totally unacceptable to God who desires His people to worship in spirit and truth. It is not a religion but a personal relationship with Jesus. No one comes to the Father except through Him. When one knows God as Father, there is nothing separating the person from Him. The Father finds no fault with him. Jesus said He does not even have to speak to the Father on our behalf because the Father Himself loves you.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Religion is a waste of time. Man loves religion of some kind. It makes him feel good. God seeks a relationship which is totally His work and deals a death blow to the pride of man who has to humble himself and acknowledge that his way leads to death and God's way to life.

God has acted in His way that no one will ever be able to proclaim what they had done to accomplish their salvation.

Isaiah 26:12 You have ordained peace for us for all that we have accomplished is what You have done.

911 – THE TWIN TOWERS

John 9 and John 11

There is another Nine Eleven.

In John's Gospel Chapter 9 and Chapter 11. How are they linked?

In **John 9**, a man was born blind. This was a disaster for the family, because instead of caring for his parents, he would be a burden to them all his life.

In **John 11**, Lazarus died. A death is a disaster in any family, especially if that person dies without personal faith in the Lord Jesus.

The Twin Towers in New York was a disaster for thousands of people. For most, probably went into a destiny of eternal weeping and for some, into eternal rejoicing in the presence of the Triune God.

Daniel 12:2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Both apparent disasters in John 9 and 11 brought glory to the Father and the Son who did exactly what the Father wanted Him to do and said exactly what the Father wanted Him to say.

Jesus taught that there is always instant communication between the Trinity, as shown in the following scriptures:

John 7:6 My time has not yet come.

John 11:41 Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.

John 12:49 For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.



READ

John 9 A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

Jesus saw a man who was blind from birth. His disciples asked, “Who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?” Jesus replied, “Neither this man nor his parents.”

In the Middle East everyone believes that if there is anything wrong with you physically or you have an accident or suffer through illness, you are being punished for your sinful ways.

Jesus clearly teaches that that is a wrong belief or teaching. However, everyone is born spiritually blind. He taught Nicodemus that a person cannot see the Kingdom of God unless he is born of God or has received

the Holy Spirit. A person cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God through reason or logic. It is an act of the will but wholly dependent on the will and purpose of God.

Jesus taught His disciples not to make this blind man a theological case but while He was still around to restore the man's sight. He seems to teach that the man was born blind so that Jesus could restore his sight and bring him to Salvation.

The man never asked to be healed because he himself said later on that no one had ever heard of a man born blind being given sight. It appears that the man was singled out for special treatment. Jesus made mud using His saliva and told the man to go to the pool of Siloam and wash out the mud He placed on his eyes. He obeyed Jesus and came back seeing.

Does God do this today? Does He single out people for special treatment? Indeed, He does. Three factual stories follow:

An expectant mother gave birth to her fourth daughter. Daughters are not as valued as sons, who look after their parents in old age. The daughter was born with deformed hands and feet. The mother was told by the grandmother not to bring the child home as she would be a burden to the family. The "cursed" child would never get married and would be regarded as a subject of shame for the family. A foreign couple looking to adopt a child was phoned and told to go to the hospital. Two baby girls were offered to them. After prayer and clear guidance from God, the Armenian baby with the deformities was adopted to the surprise of the hospital staff. At the age of 4, she told her new mother that she wanted to put her trust in Jesus and years later, after graduating as a teacher, she served with her husband as a missionary in the land of her birth. Do you get the feeling you've heard this story before? You should! It's the story of how we became the loving parents of our daughter, Jeanette. Those hands were an apparent disaster but resulted in her being given special treatment by God to bring about her Salvation.

A widow at the age of 84 spoke to me at a hotel and told me that a young man had told her the previous year that she must be born again. She asked me where that came from and what it meant. I sat next to her and read **John 3** about Nicodemus. I then gave her other scriptures. The next day, I found her in the lounge alone going through those scriptures and suggested that she accompany me to a nearby chapel. There she put her faith in Jesus and thereafter told everyone she met that she used to be troubled by the term "born again" but now no longer, as she was thrilled. She heard me

preach at a city church and thought it was the best sermon she had ever heard. The result of being born again.

A few months later, I had a chance meeting with someone from that city who told me that she was being used as an example and that it is never too late to come to faith in Jesus.

Three different people. Each one treated specially on a One-on-one basis. Apparent disaster but God organised that each one came into a living relationship with Jesus.



READ

John 11 The Death of Lazarus

Jesus taught that the illness of Lazarus would not end in death but would result in the glory of the Son of God. The works of God would be displayed in Lazarus.

On hearing of the illness of Lazarus, Jesus purposely delayed his departure for Bethany two more days. Relatives flocked to Martha and Mary's home in Bethany to comfort them. On arrival in Bethany, Jesus found Lazarus had been dead 4 days. He met Martha in the street and later Mary. He spoke to Martha but wept with Mary, identifying with those who have lost loved ones. A One-on-one with both, however, both sisters blamed Jesus for not being there to stop Lazarus from dying.

Martha believed in the resurrection on the last day and that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God, yet when Jesus told them to roll away the stone from the tomb, she called out: "But Lord, he has been dead four days and the smell would hit them." Whoever had heard of a man dead for 4 days rising from the dead? So, her belief was in theory. Many of us are like that.

Hebrews 3:7-8 Today if you hear His voice & harden not your heart. That verse is repeated in various ways five times. Why? We believe the Bible. But when God calls us to trust only Him, we, like Martha, say "But Lord". We see problems and not the Lord. We so often harden our hearts and see problems instead of obeying the Lord. There comes a time when the heart becomes too hard to hear His voice. We do not know how He will carry out His promises. It's almost as though Jesus does not know all the facts and He needs to be put right. How can dead ears hear? How can a dead body come out? I do not know but God does. If we obey God, we will discover that He knows what He is doing. Next time we will hear Him more clearly and not try to put Him right.

Martha allowed her humanity to voice an objection. She also allowed her past experience to get in the way. Jesus told her not to look to an event on the last day but trust Him who is in charge on that day. When He asked her if she believed Him, she confessed that He was the Messiah, the Son of God.

After the stone was rolled away, Jesus prayed aloud so that all would hear that the Father had sent Jesus the Son and gave God the glory.

Just as in **John 9** so it is in **John 11** that Jesus gave people special treatment. God will try to establish a closer contact with those who belong to Him. With you. Be willing to listen and obey.

This One-on-one is very important. Just you and Jesus. Reading books and hearing about experiences of other people, while encouraging, cannot replace what you read and discover as you read God's Word as a child willing to listen and learn.

Today, yes, this very day when God speaks to you as though you are the only person in your family, listen and obey and you too will discover the rest God alone can give you. It is the intention of God that we all experience His rest. There will be times of trial and distress when God is trying to get your attention. After you turn afresh to Him and trust Him, you will enter His rest.

God uses trouble to get your attention. It should be the experience of every follower of Jesus. He makes us all examples of special treatment that we might be in a vibrant living daily relationship with Him.

Christ in You, the hope of glory. No Christ, No hope. This is the testimony that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life and he who has not the Son of God has not life.

CONSIDER JESUS

There are three times when Jesus said, “I AM”, which are not included in the 14 “I AMs”.

John 7:34 Where I AM, there you cannot come (those opposed to Him).

John 12:26 Where I AM there My servant will be also.

John 14:3 Where I AM there you might be also.

What do these mean?

Jesus has never changed even though He took on human form, yet in Himself He was always in harmony with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Sin never tarnished the Godhead. There was no break in the bond. He could say “Where I am”, not “Where I am going,” or “What I will be.” To His disciples and those present with others opposed to Him, He could say “I am in a world totally different to yours. I am in heaven already. I am there.” He would welcome the disciples to His Father’s house, and they would be with Him. Where I am. Out on the road, or alone with His disciples or welcoming them home, did not result in any change in His locality.

Jesus was in constant communication with the other persons of the Trinity. Others observing Him did not realize that. To the thief on the cross “Today you will be with Me in paradise.” He spoke to Nathanael of heaven being open and the angels ascending and descending upon Himself. That was happening all the time, but they were not aware of it. He could say “Where I am. Confined to a body, confined to one locality at a time but only for 33 years”. In His person and character “Where I am” never changes.

We who belong to Him will be with Him where He is for all eternity. He that has the Son, has life now and that will never change even with physical death. No break in the bond.

He is the Son of Man and was existent before birth: **Daniel 7:13-14 I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.**

He was born of a virgin: **Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.**

A boy, titles: **Isaiah 9:6** For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called **Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

Emmanuel (God with us), born in Bethlehem. His birth and life brought pleasure to God. **Isaiah 42:1** Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

Quietly going about doing good, justice to the Gentiles, restore the spoiled, complete what He has set out to do. **Isaiah 42:2-4** He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. **3** A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. **4** He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.

An ordinary man, member of a family. He did what He did for us, He dealt with every aspect of sin, He restores us, He raised no objection to the treatment meted out to Him. His suffering gave God pleasure:



READ

Isaiah 53 The Sin-Bearing Messiah

He entered Jerusalem by donkey, rejected by men, His manner of death predicted: **Psalm 22:6-7,16** But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. **7** All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head. **16** ...they pierced My hands and My feet.

Isaiah 1:11 I delight not in the blood of bullocks because it meant our Salvation. He Himself would see the results of His suffering and be satisfied.

The 14 “I AMs” of Jesus. Every one of these truths about Jesus is a constant. He said I AM. Now, tomorrow, eternity I am still what I said I am. I never change. Each one is a definite, no doubt about it. Not that it was something He became or something that He will cease to be. Each one was in a different situation, applicable in those circumstances so the 14 “I AMs” of Jesus are like different facets of a diamond, different aspects of His person. Each one meets a need, the problem solved, the need was met. Jesus through these revelations of Himself, shows us that there is no other. Just as God said to Moses “I am that I am”. Eternal, mysterious, personal, self-sufficient, no beginning, no end.

Jesus is saying every time “I am different to anyone else. No one compares with Me.” All creatures had a beginning and will have a physical end. Not

so Jesus. He is the only man who can say “Before Abraham was, I am” because “Jesus Christ He is He is yesterday today and forever”. Always keep that in mind when we go through the 14 “I AMs” of Jesus.

All the “I AMs” of Jesus come from the pen of John. So many are part of a message pointing to Himself. We need to see each “I AM” in context. Any other person and you would think he was self-centred but Jesus must make it clear that He, the Son of God, came to make known that He Himself was the solution of God to the problem and consequences of sin

1. I AM the Messiah:

John 4:25-26 The woman saith unto Him, “I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things.” **26** Jesus saith unto her, “I that speak unto thee am He.”

The Samaritan woman said this after Jesus had told her everything about herself. Jesus had dealt with her according to her expectations as He does with every one of us. Now He reveals Himself by saying He is the Messiah.

2. I AM the Fulfilment of all Messianic Prophecy:

Isaiah 59:16 God was appalled there was no one to intervene, no intercessor so His own arm brought salvation. NIV.

Sin is a big problem to God. It must be punished but at the same time God loves the sinner and wants to be in a Father/son relationship. So, God set about resolving the sin question by preparing the way for the Messiah over about 2000 years. God always follows the same method of solving a problem. He first makes promises and then in due time, *the right time*, He acts. With regard to the problem of sin, He made many promises about His solution and waited, in our thinking a long time, because He was determined to accomplish His goal to become the Father of nations and individuals. The time had to be right. The world prepared by Alexander’s conquests making Greek the common language and Rome an Empire that had relative security for the spread of good news.

3. I AM the Anointed of God to Deal with the Sin of the World:

Isaiah 53:12 Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Luke 22:37 For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me, “And He was reckoned among the transgressors:” for the things concerning Me have an end.

Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies by His actions and words (riding into Jerusalem on a donkey; calling out “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”) but here He actually says that this Messianic prophecy is fulfilled when He is included with known breakers of God’s law. He became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus is actually saying that He is the Messiah, that the prophecies concern Him. Those prophecies have an end. Did He mean “end” by death or the prophecies are completely fulfilled in Him never to be repeated?

After His Resurrection He told two that the Messiah had to suffer and enter His glory and expounded the prophecies in the Pentateuch and prophets as being fulfilled in Himself.

Jesus does the same for us today. The Holy Spirit reveals Him. On the cross a thief saw Jesus and saw the King. Normally when a king dies, so ends his kingdom. Yet the thief saw a King whose kingdom would never end. Only the Holy Spirit could have revealed that to him. Contrast the thief on the cross with the religious leaders who had planned the death of Jesus. Imagine the contrast in eternal destiny.

Jesus is King and reigns. His Kingdom is eternal and will never be replaced. The Father tells us to listen to Him. A reminder that there is no other.

Since Jesus is the Messiah who solved the problem God had with sin and our salvation then He can solve any problem of man. We must not limit Him by our expectations. We need to involve Him constantly in our affairs, because failure to do so results in frustration and disappointment. We often refer to Him when the problem is too big for us so why not consider Him when the problems are everyday ones? We rely on common sense and think we know everything and there can be no alternative. Therefore, consider Jesus. Think not just about Him but involve Him in your affairs. He will deal with you according to your expectations.

4. I AM the Bread of Life:

John 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.”

The people asked Jesus for a sign because it is written “He gave them bread from heaven.” Jesus said it was not Moses but His Father who gives the true bread. They asked for the true bread; they were thinking of actual bread which would be available always. Just like the woman at the well who wanted living water so she would not need to come to that well alone in her shame. We come alive. He that has the Son has life. How does Jesus

satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst? When we come to Him. Our search is over. We will not consider another. Anything else satisfies for a moment but leaves us feeling empty and lonely.

John 7:37 If any man thirst let him come to Me and let him who believes in Me drink.

Our first step is to come into His presence. Second step is to daily drink what Jesus gives. A relationship has started. Lord and servant which never changes. All the major titles of Jesus are relational. Lord/servants, Rabbi/disciples, Son of God/The Father, Saviour/sinners, Christ/Father/lost sinners. So, we need to have that relationship restored. After that, we drink of the water of life that He gives.

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.

Jesus does not say He will talk or listen but simply be present eating and sharing life with us. Man shall not live by bread alone – the result of hard work, man’s effort – but by every word of God which is needed to direct our course of action.

5. I AM From Above:

John 8:23 And He said unto them, “Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.”

The Jews were puzzled because He claimed “I am different to mankind therefore do not equate Me with any other man. Mankind is limited in ability and his resources, limited by time, he gets old and weak and helpless spoiled by sin, but My origin is heaven.” Lord at His birth. Coupled with **John 8:58** Before Abraham was I AM. The Jews wanted to stone Him because He said exactly what God said to Moses “I AM THAT I AM.” Jesus is claiming to be the same God that spoke to Moses. Eternally awesome in power with the ability to save and keep and complete what He has begun. Creator of all things. Ageless, never tired or surprised. With all the attributes of a person. Afflicted when we are afflicted, known by a Holy name who existed before Abraham. The only God. Mysterious – God is complex. Perfect God and Perfect man. In all His actions and words and thoughts. His ways and His thoughts are so different to ours. Unlimited in what He can do. Yet while on earth limited in presence by His body. But now we can do all things through Him who strengthens us.

Think about this Jesus. Born of a virgin, sinless, performed many miracles, a mirror of the Father, crucified for who He was, the Son of Man, the Messiah of God, who rose from the dead. Through Him came Salvation to young and old, wise and foolish. He is from above. Now He is in us. All power and authority has been given to Him.

Isaiah 26:12 All that we do is His doing.

Able to save and keep, never at a loss for a solution. Do not limit Him by past experience or by present problems or future fears. Faith is strengthened when we know the person and character of Jesus. Faith needs to be exercised to get stronger. You exercise faith in things every day. So, you need to exercise faith in One whom you have never seen but will one day. If you do not use it, you will lose it. Faith grows stronger through usage.

6. I AM the Light of the World:

John 9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

If we have a sudden power failure, our world is plunged into darkness and this helps us understand what it is to be blind. A candle helps. He called Himself the light of the world while He was in it. Now He is still in it and we have the light of life. Jesus said that He had come, that those who see not might see and those who see might be made blind. He is obviously speaking about spiritual blindness. To see spiritually, one has to admit that he is blind and needs the sight and light that Jesus alone gives. To think that you do not need Jesus because you think you have found the truth apart from Him results in spiritual blindness. Light reveals our shortcomings, it also reveals His all sufficiency. It reveals the solution in time of need. That is why we need Him daily.

7. I AM the Door:

John 10:7,9 Then said Jesus unto them again, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the Door of the sheep." 9 "I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

All that came before Him were thieves. One heads for a door as the entrance, so Jesus says I am the entrance. ME. The entrance to salvation and thereafter Jesus remains the door for those that are His. Through Him they go in and out – in for security and out for food, but He remains the entrance. We go astray when we stop relying on Him for security and food.

8. I AM the Good Shepherd:

John 10:11,27-28 I am the Good Shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. 27 I know My sheep and am known of mine. My sheep

hear My voice and they follow Me and 28 I give them eternal life and they shall never perish neither shall any pluck them out of My hand.

A close relationship exists between Jesus and His followers. They become His followers through His death but because He rose again, no one can pluck them out of His hand. They hear His voice. They hear the inaudible and know it is Jesus. They follow Him. They do not run ahead, or go their own way. They receive eternal life as a gift. A life that never ceases that begins on earth, a relationship of being in the hand of Jesus. I belong to Jesus, which starts in time and never ends.

Psalm 73:23 I am with You. No separation will ever take place.



READ

Psalm 23 adds a few more details.

The shepherd is responsible for the needs of the sheep, He makes me lie down to meditate on that which I have eaten. He provides water from a well. When the sheep wander into a vineyard and could be forfeited to the owner for damage done, then the Shepherd pays the price to restore it to the flock. Likewise, we are redeemed by a price paid which only the Lord can pay. He leads me in right paths in accordance with His character. His presence assures me of security in danger. He uses a rod to hold me in place to examine where I have needs of healing and refreshment. He is never stingy – my cup overflows. The Shepherd never changes in His handling of the sheep and they will spend eternity with Him.

9. I AM the Son of God:

John 10:35-36 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; 36 say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

Jesus had told those opposed to Him that they do not believe because they are not His sheep.

“Son of” means “of the same order of”. Son of God means “of the order of God”, equality and identity of nature (Jewish usage.) I and the Father are one. One is neuter not one person but one in nature and action. Plural verb. Two persons. To be in the hand of Jesus is to be in the hand of the Father. To see Jesus is to see the Father. He that has seen Me has seen the Father. The Son and the Father make their home in us. Jesus reveals His close relationship with the Father.

10. I AM the Resurrection and the Life:

John 11:25 Jesus said unto her, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

Of course, the Resurrection of Jesus proved that He was the Son of God. Jesus says, “do not think of some distant event but realize that in this situation I am in control.” On that final day when the dead will hear His voice and rise, Jesus is saying “I am in charge on that day. Do not look forward to an event but to Me who is in charge of the resurrection.” Just as Lazarus would rise when Jesus called, so the dead will hear His voice and rise; some to everlasting life and some to everlasting shame and contempt. When Jesus asked Martha if she believed that, she replied that she believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus was saying that as the representative of the entire human race, when He rose from the dead then all who were united to Him by faith would experience resurrection and through faith in Him, they too would live a new life. Martha believed but could not see the application in the case of Lazarus. She told Jesus that Lazarus would be smelly after four days of death. Jesus reminded her that if she believed she would see the glory of God. What is that glory? The ability of God to do what man cannot. Break the power of the devil, of sin and death.

John 11:4 When Jesus heard that, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”

The Son of God would be seen to be stronger than death. Later of course He Himself would rise from the dead confirming all the claims He had made. Jesus Himself is the Resurrection and the Life. Neither is possible without Him. He rose from the dead. United to Him by faith we too rise to newness of life. Of course, we must first be united to Him in His death before we can know newness of life in His Resurrection.

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

“I am the Resurrection” is explained by “he who believes in Me though he dies yet shall he live.” If you have the Son, you have life –Jesus is here talking about quality of life – eternal life being alive to God, alive to His leading, and His discipline. Jesus is in charge of the final resurrection.

I am the life is explained by whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Physical death does not result in any break in the relationship.

John 8:51 Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death.

Psalm 73:24 You guide me with Your counsel and afterwards receive me to glory. No mention of an end or death. Jesus is there to welcome you.

To the follower of Jesus death is not a break. Eternal life, quality of life is enjoyed now and will never end.

11. I AM the Lord and Master:

John 13:13-15 You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.

14 If I have washed your feet you ought also to wash one another's feet.

15 If I have acted as a servant so should you.

Galatians 5:13 By love serve one another.

Lord/Rabbi/teacher and Master, one to whom they owe all. Jesus asked, "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I tell you?"

Jesus has just transformed the ordinary into something special. They would never forget it. Jesus washing His disciples' feet should inspire us to regard the ordinary things in life as opportunities to do them as unto Jesus to bring Him pleasure. Washing feet – a menial task – willing to be a door mat. Willing to serve. In rugby some score the tries, but many play the role of servants making that possible. There must be a willingness to accept a role out of the limelight. Washing of feet is part of accepting one into your home. Servants do that. Trust the Lord for His reward and care not for the praise of people.

12. I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life:

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

Jesus had said, "You know where I am going, and you know the way." (Jesus was saying to them that the answers or solutions were right there in their presence). Thomas said, "We do not know where You are going and how can we know the way?"

There is an exclusivity about this verse that there is no other that has the same truth, except **Matthew 11:27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.** Obnoxious to the unbelieving world who are similar to the people of Jeremiah's day.

Jeremiah 5:31 The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own power, my people love to have it so but what will you do in the end?

The test of truth is God's test on the Day of Judgment.

Jesus is stating without question that there is no other. What He says will stand the test of God. Any other teaching will fail on the Day of Judgment.

I am the way. My person, what I am and what I have done. Jesus keeps our focus on Himself. There is no other.

- Any other way leads to destruction.
- Any other teaching leads away from God,
- any other spirit leads to death.

Jesus Himself is the Way to the Father.

Once you have come through Jesus and know God as your Father, He finds no fault in you. The way to live life, the way to deal with every situation, the way to overcome the evil one.

I am the way and I will keep you on the way because I am the signposts and the life. You will not fail to get to the Father, I as your life will make sure you do not fall short.

He also said I am the truth. Beware of any teaching that does not have its focus on the Lord Jesus. People come on visits and seem religious but avoid Jesus. Professors appear to know it all but lead many astray at university by not showing the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and way to the Father. Check any new teaching by how it values Jesus.

I am the truth. Personified. Leave Me out and you go into error. He is the fulfilment of the promises and prophecies of God's servants. He is the Messiah. Look for no other teaching. Many false prophets would deceive many because Jesus is the truth and Him alone. The Spirit of truth will guide us into all truth. He will take of the things of Christ and reveal them to us. He will glorify Christ. He will teach us all things. Jesus is the truth – The Spirit of Truth – one God, two of the three persons of the Trinity. Both with the same character trait. Our role is to study the scriptures and allow the Spirit of truth to reveal more of Jesus and all He is and all He has done.

1 Samuel 12:20-21 Serve the Lord with all your heart 21 and do not turn aside after empty things that are worthless.

Anything other than Christ is classified as empty things that are worthless. We waste so much time watching TV and DVDs that take up time and leave us feeling empty. Spend time with the Word and be taught by the Spirit and you will be full of life,

Many verses about new life in Christ:

- John 14:6 I am the life.
- Philippians 1:21 For to me to live is Christ.
- 1 John 5:12 He that has the Son has life.
- Romans 13:14 Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- John 10:10 I am come that they may have life more abundantly.

So many verses connect Jesus and the risen new life we have united to Him. We cannot imagine life without Christ. Everything that heaven has to offer, every spiritual blessing is in Christ.

John 1:4-5 In Him was life and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:9 The true Light that lights up every man that comes into world.

Everyone is included, spiritual illumination is available for all.

That which was from the beginning which we have heard which we have seen with our eyes which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of Life. For the life was manifested and we have seen it, that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.

No one comes to the Father except through Me. Once you know the Father personally you will know that condemnation is past.

John 5:22 The Father finds fault with no one but has given all judgment to the Son.

Of course, one can avoid Jesus and seek to reach God another way but then never meet God as Father but Jesus as judge with no advocate, no one to plead their case.

No Son = no Father.

No Son = no salvation.

No Son = no way that leads to life eternal.

No Son = no truth that changes a person's life.

No Son = no eternal life now or ever.

Jesus will be the judge to whom every knee will bow.

13. I AM the True Vine:

John 15:1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

A long discourse on union with Jesus resulting in fruit. Look at any vine and it looks dead on the outside. It cannot be used in furniture making but when the right season comes there is life and fruit. So, Jesus was like any other man, part of a family, an ordinary looking man from Nazareth that grew

up there for 30 years. A contrast to the vine of Israel that had failed dismally to produce the fruit that would bring pleasure to God.

Jesus is not saying that He is just the stem but the vine which consists of stem, branches, leaves, fruit. We are the branches. Branches are also ordinary except at first, they are green and fresh. We are in Christ, in Him. Abide in Him and we produce much fruit. Fruit is a lifestyle that brings pleasure to God, it includes reaching the lost but more than that, branches that bear fruit are pruned to bear more. Discipline is part of God's program to bring the Father more pleasure by the life we live and make us more effective. Those that do not bear fruit are lifted up so that they will bear fruit. Jesus is the vine and the Father is the One who makes sure that the outworking of the life of Jesus results in fruit. Jesus ever remains the vine and His Father ever works through Him. We never cease to be just a branch. No matter how much God uses us or blesses us we remain but branches dependent on the vine. Never cease viewing yourself as a servant prepared to be a doormat if need be. His Word has a cleansing effect.

Read it and it takes the place of that which spoils and tarnishes character.

Read it and the Holy Spirit uses it in His own time.

Read and discover your possessions in Christ.

14. I AM the Alpha and the Omega:

Revelation 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending," saith the Lord, "which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

Last letters to the church from the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Why were these revealed to John? Because the Holy Spirit had already revealed the other "I AMs." John more than any other was used to unfold the deity of Jesus.

The beginning and the end. Of course, Jesus is also the in-between if He was and is and is to come. Jesus pointed out to Saul that He Himself was suffering at the hands of Saul. Jesus began the good work in us as the author of our salvation and remains involved. In all their afflictions He was afflicted. So, He who has begun a good work within us is busy bringing that to completion. Jesus is Lord. That never changes. That is coupled with the last I AM.

Revelation 1:17-18 Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Isaiah 44:6 Thus says the Lord the King of Israel and His redeemer the Lord of Hosts. I am the first and I am the last and beside Me there is no God.

Jesus is King. Lord, Redeemer, there is no other.

In His letters to the seven churches, Jesus makes it clear that He is very much still involved in His body, the church and the world. Later He reveals His method in His work in the world. The gospel goes out followed by persecution, but He is even in control of that. Famines and disease and natural disasters will follow but He reigns. His servants overcome the evil won by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.

Of course, every time Jesus says I AM, He is saying that He is the solution to man's every need. He is also saying do not look anywhere else. Beware of revelations that have never been thought of before.

14 "I AMs"; each one from the mouth of Jesus. Each one concentrates on His person.

- I AM the Messiah
- I AM the Fulfilment of all Messianic Prophecy
- I AM the Anointed of God – to Deal with the Sin of the World
- I AM the Bread of Life
- I AM from above – unique unlike any other. Unique in origin, in life, in character, in success defeating all opposition, in power through a risen life. Before Abraham was, I AM – eternal, unchanging.
- I AM the Light of the world– light of life.
- I AM the Door – security and provision.
- I AM the Good Shepherd – what is mine stays mine.
- I AM the Son of God – God's gift, His best.
- I AM the Resurrection and the life – confirmation of His deity.
- I AM Lord and Master – Only one. The Messiah.
- I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life – not rules but a person.
- I AM the True Vine – fruit to please God.
- I AM Alpha and Omega – First and Last, completion of task.

These are all a testimony to the glory of God who has accomplished the redeeming of a family from every tribe, tongue and nation to share eternity with the Triune God.

God says, "This is My Son in whom I am well pleased." Listen to Him.

If you honour the Son, you will honour the Father who sent Him.
But if you reject the Son, you will reject the Father who sent Him.

COMMON TRUTHS

Matthew and John

In each case of three separate recordings of the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and John, the same subject is dealt with, and they reveal the vital roles of the persons of the Triune God.

1. The Role of the Father

Matthew 15:12-14 Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” **13** But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. **14** Let them alone, they are blind leaders of the blind and if the blind leads the blind both will fall into a ditch.”

John 6:43-47 Jesus answered and said, “Do not murmur among yourselves, **44** No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day. **45** Every one who has learned and heard from the Father comes to Me. **46** Not that anyone has seen the Father except He who is from God. He has seen the Father. **47** Most assuredly I say to you He who believes in Me has everlasting life.”

The Pharisees were the religious teachers and leaders of the day. Today they are to be found in universities dissecting the Bible, its vocabulary, the style and possible origins, all from a human point of view. They tend to forget the fact that all of it is God-breathed. So many young people from Christian homes think that Biblical Studies will be an easy subject because of their Bible knowledge but many lose their faith as it comes under attack at university. Imagine receiving a message of good news and then examining the words used, the style, the messenger himself and not responding to the message of Jesus, the only Saviour who has changed millions of lives.

Jesus said, “Every plant that My Father in heaven has not planted will be uprooted.” Were they planted by the Father in heaven? If a person is not planted by the Father, he is blind. He might have many degrees and have much knowledge but if God has not planted him, he will be uprooted, wither and die and never produce fruit acceptable to the Father in heaven. In Salvation God takes the initiative because no one seeks after God. There is none righteous no not one. In Salvation from sin God does it all. **Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest any one should boast. Salvation is a gift, so is eternal life and God imparts saving faith to us which

causes us to respond. He told His disciples to ignore the Pharisees. We need to examine the origin of those who claim to be teachers of the Bible.

Interesting that God did not leave a certain violent Pharisee alone. A Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus! He was at the height of his feelings, he was at the peak of self-righteousness, but God has His own way of dealing with the wise and learned and its best to leave it to Him.

Jesus was encountering increased opposition from the Pharisees and religious leaders. He was teaching His disciples that they had been drawn to follow Him by the Father. This takes time so that when they hear His call they respond immediately. Nathanael under the fig tree was thinking about the Messiah and when Jesus spoke about him, he responded without hesitation. Everyone that has learned and heard from the Father comes to Me. So, the Father uses a variety of means to teach and speak to individuals through the circumstances of life. Good preparation of the soil prior to hearing the call of the Saviour.

Jesus said that He was the only One who had seen the Father. Only He knows the person and character of the Father in His fulness, so He alone can reveal the Father and cause a relationship of Father and son.

Suddenly Jesus says that those who believe in Him have everlasting life. Why speak about life?

The Father teaches about the Son and urges us to listen to Him. After Pentecost the Holy Spirit reveals the Son when God imparts saving faith causing the sinner to believe in Jesus, he receives everlasting life.

2. God Reveals the Truth to His Children

Matthew 11:25-27 Jesus said, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth that You have hidden these things from the wise and learned and have revealed them to babes. 26 Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. 27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

John 14:6-10 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. 7 If you had known Me you would have known My Father also and from now on you know Him and have seen Him. 9 He who has seen Me has seen the Father. 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does the works."

These second two passages also show that the Father hides the truth from those who think they are wise and know everything but reveals the truth to those who come as children. Jesus tells us again that only the Father knows the Son. Thus, to know the Son requires the help of the Father who through the Holy Spirit reveals the Lord Jesus.

Only the Son knows the Father and he whom He chooses to reveal the Father. Jesus is clearly stating that it is impossible to know God as Father without the help of the Son. Jesus chooses who should know God as Father. There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Only when we deal directly with the Lord Jesus do we come to understand the Father.

In **John 14:6** Jesus said “**I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**” He did not say “God” but “Father”. Once a person knows God as Father then judgement and condemnation are past because the Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son.

I AM the Way: There is no other. You need the person of Jesus in your life as Master and Lord, then the Father reveals Himself. You know yourself as His son whom He will love and discipline.

I AM the Truth: The signposts point the way so that you do not get lost. Keep looking at Me and you will not go astray.

I AM the Life: If you die you will not get lost because if Jesus is your life you will not fail to arrive at your destination.

3. A personal response to the person of Jesus is required for rest and usefulness

Matthew 11:28 Come to Me all you who labour are heavy laden I will give you rest.

John 7:37-39 Jesus stood and cried, “If anyone thirsts let him come to Me. and **38** Let him who believes in Me drink as the scripture has said out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. **39** By this He spoke concerning the Spirit whom those believing in Him would receive.”

Millions will never meet and know God as Father because they reject the person and work of Jesus. Their encounter with God is that of before a judge and they stand alone. A day of great ongoing distress.

Both Matthew and John record Jesus calling the people to come to Him. The law plus over 900 rules had made life a burden for the Jew. Jesus says,

“I will give you rest.” A yoke means the burden of life is shared; an easy yoke, which Jesus does the major share and His burden is light, not a list of rules but a life of daily dependence on Him doing His will that day, learning from Him and allowing Him to take the lead as One who is gentle and humble resulting in rest.

John records Jesus telling people to come to Him if they are thirsty. The Holy Spirit has worked creating a longing for spiritual satisfaction. This is not a natural desire but the work of God. Just come to Jesus. Then he who believes in Him let him drink daily. For his own enjoyment? No. He is just to be a channel. Freely you receive, freely you must give. Out of you will flow rivers of living water. You need to receive before you can give out. When we receive Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit who needs the Word of God to bless us and others.

Conclusions:

- Salvation is entirely the work of God so that no-one will ever talk about themselves in heaven.
- Salvation is a gift.
- Saving faith is a gift.
- We respond because God enables us to respond.

MOST RELIABLE WITNESS

The best witnesses at a crime scene are those who have heard, seen and were involved. On the day that the Messiah of the Jews was crucified, there were two others who suffered the same death because of their way of life. **Luke 23:32 Two other men, both criminals were also led out with Jesus to be executed.** That day they stood waiting and observed what happened to Jesus of Nazareth. They heard Him say to Pilate. **John 18:36-37 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” 37 Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”**

Then the two heard Pilate say: **John 19:6, “As for me I find no basis for a charge against Him.”** The accusation above the head of Jesus, on the Cross, read “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.” Jesus was put to death for what He claimed to be, rather than for what He had done.

The two men then heard Jesus say **Luke 23:34: “Father forgive them, they know not what they are doing.”** They saw how he did not retaliate but actually prayed for those executing Him. They were being punished justly for what they had done.

Luke 23:39-43 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” 40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” 43 And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

The first thief on the cross spoke to Jesus, we call it prayer. “If you are the Messiah save yourself and us.” He wanted to use Jesus. He wanted religion but not a relationship. Jesus did not respond. It would have confirmed man’s view of life that God is not involved. He went to hell that day. An awful place. Of weeping and great regret. A very lonely place where people are totally self-centred.

The other thief was given great insight. He said to the other criminal, **“Do you not fear God?”** It tells you that that man feared God because when he died, he would have to give an account for the way he had used his life. This applies to all of us. What we say, what we do, what we think will require an explanation before God who knows everything: our words, motives and priorities in life. The man on the cross feared God.

That man was honest with himself and that is the best way to start on the road of recovery of a life lived without God. He said, “I deserve to be punished, I deserve death.” He knows that not only will he be punished in this life, he feared that he would be punished when he faced God. He would give an account of his wasted life with no excuses acceptable. He needed someone after death to speak on his behalf.

His theology was incomplete. He knew nothing about the roles that Jesus played. He only saw the man. Jesus dealt directly with Him. What did he know? That he deserved to be punished. That Jesus had done nothing wrong. That Jesus was King of another sphere. His incomplete theology did not stop him dealing directly with Jesus. Do not expect to know everything about Salvation and what God has planned for your life. That man had a true valuation of Jesus. **“This man Jesus has done nothing wrong.”** Where did he get that idea? He heard what Pilate said about Jesus. Pilate who had sentenced him to death for his crimes found Jesus was innocent. He was correct. Jesus never sinned. He was being punished for our sins that separate us from God. It was predicted by the prophet **Isaiah 53:4-5 Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering. 5 He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed.** Jesus is unique. There is no one who can compare with Him. The criminal saw that Jesus was crucified as the religious leaders envied Him because of His popularity with the common people. Jesus was put to death for who He claimed to be rather than what He had done.

This man spoke to Jesus. That is required by everyone in the world. They have to individually deal directly with Jesus. They need to know who He really is and be honest with Him who they really are: Sinners deserving death and punishment.

What did he say to Jesus? **“Remember me when you come into Your kingdom.”** He accepted that Jesus was who He said He is, the King of the Jews. That He is King of another world.

Will Jesus speak up for you? Were you ashamed of Him in your life and amongst your friends? Jesus said if this is so, He would be ashamed of you. The man was aware of just punishment for the life he lived but Jesus in His reply did not refer to that man's wasted life but only to the glorious fact that Jesus and he would spend eternity together. The man did not realise that Jesus dying on the Cross was dealing with his sin so that he had nothing to fear from God. In fact, he would be a joint heir with Christ.

Do you have this confidence and assurance that your sins have been forgiven and you will be spending eternity with Jesus? Have you dealt directly and honestly with Jesus? Only Jesus can say **"I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly."** Only Jesus says, **"I am the only way to the Father."**

If you know God as your Father, then your sins have been forgiven and nothing separates you from the Father. You will never meet God as your judge. The Father will never refer to your past life. Jesus will want to know what you did with your life after coming to faith in Him.

Jesus said to the man "there will be separation from your body today, but you and I will never be separated." Someone to look forward to. Not only that but Jesus would act as High Priest and Advocate with the Father and that man would never feel alone in the Kingdom of King Jesus. Absent from the body, but present with Jesus.

The man did not confess his sins to Jesus but openly admitted he was getting what he deserved for a life of going his own way. He realised Jesus was no ordinary man because no man enters His Kingdom the day he dies. Thus, the Kingdom of Jesus must be a heavenly eternal Kingdom. He had spiritual insight to perceive that Jesus would be able to remember him after death.

Let us examine what the 2nd criminal saw, heard and did.

- He heard Jesus say, **"My kingdom is not of this world."** It is an invisible kingdom that has always existed. Jesus said, "Before Abraham was I AM." Jesus existed before He was born of a virgin and lived on earth. His kingdom is not of this world. Jesus says He is King of another place.
- He told His disciples that He **was going to prepare a place for them in His Father's house.** He wanted them to be with Him. Another world exists that is invisible. Jesus lived in that world even while visibly present on earth. Did Jesus say this during His ministry? **John 14:2-3 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place**

for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. Jesus was saying that He was only passing through. This was not His home. He owned no property or possessions except what He wore. All will one day have to downsize and move, but one day you will be leaving this world for eternity. What is important to you? The visible? Do you waste your words and thoughts on sport, politics and finance? All of that is transient. All of that will be left behind.

- **Luke 16:9 And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.** How? As prompted by God. You will discover that the very best financial investment you can make will make heaven a place where you will never feel alone. What of your relatives and friends that know not Jesus? Resolve to be available to God to be His instrument to encourage, help and make known what God accomplished when Jesus died, was buried and rose again. Seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.
- Jesus said that **when a person is born again, he will see the Kingdom of God and will enter it.** Are you aware of that Kingdom where Jesus is King? Are you a citizen of that Kingdom because Jesus has made your heart His home?
- **“If My Kingdom were of this world My servants would fight.”** Today Christians are dying for their faith in Jesus. They do not retaliate but return good for evil.

Three men, outwardly the same, but all crucified:

1. One man going to hell for eternity. Many will join him because broad is the road that leads to destruction and many are on it. They never discover who Jesus really is. He was just a man in history. He lived a short life of rejection by the majority and died deserted by his friends. One day the majority in this world will meet Jesus when they have to give an account of their lives and be excluded from His presence for an eternity of regret and sorrow.
2. Another man crucified because of his way of life. He feared God because he did not want to give an account for his actions. He believed the evidence that the third man had done nothing wrong and was suffering because the religious and political leaders had rejected His actions. They saw Him as a threat to their standing in society. So, he asked Jesus whom he understood to have a spiritual Kingdom that would never end, to remember him. He was asking for a mediator, an advocate, a priest who would speak on his behalf when he faced God.

3. The third man was like the other two. Ordinary without a halo, crucified. Yet His words were so unusual. His words to Mary his mother and John His disciple, telling John to take care of His mother. No protests about His being innocent. Just silently suffering. Then **“Father forgive them, they know not what they do.”** And finally, **“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”** He is back home with the Father interceding for His own and passing on to the Holy Spirit what He wants those who are alive today and belong to Him to do and carry out His will. Heaven is filling up but so is hell. Where will you be?

As an onlooker, have you seen this man called Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews? This man is the Messiah. There are 48 major prophecies which are fulfilled in Jesus. Have you understood that He was not suffering for anything that He had done? Have you realised that He in fact took your place, your punishment, endured the righteous anger of God upon Himself? Have you ever dealt directly with Jesus in prayer? That is the beginning of a relationship. There is an initial breakthrough followed by a lifelong keeping in touch.

A prayer: Jesus, I admit that I have left You out of my life and that I do not know You. Thank You that You died for me taking my punishment. Thank you that You were buried and rose again. I ask You to come into my life and take over the throne in my life and show me the person You want me to be. Amen

Jesus promised that if you open the door of your life, He would come in. He keeps His promise. How do you know He has come in? You might not feel anything, but changes will take place in your life because the Holy Spirit has made His home in you. Read the Bible every day. If you do not have a Bible, get one. Spend time talking to God about what you read in the Bible. Share with another that you trust in Jesus and belong to Him for eternity. This is a good time of reaffirming that when Jesus died on the Cross I died. I died to my own will and way. I died to seeking the praise of people, I rose when Jesus rose to live a life of faith in Jesus who loved me and gave Himself for me.

A closing prayer: I affirm Lord Jesus that You are King. That You are reigning. I thank You that You died for me and rose again and through the Holy Spirit You live in me. I desire that you reign in me. That You have Your way in me. That You make me willing to do Your will whatever it is and not to count the cost. I affirm that I belong to You. Amen.

THE WORDS OF JESUS ON THE DAY HE DIED

Matthew 27:11 Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus said to him, “It is as you say.”

Mark 15:2 Then Pilate asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” He answered and said to him, “It is as you say.”

Luke 23:3 Then Pilate asked Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” He answered him and said, “It is as you say.”

John 18:33-37 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” 34 Jesus answered him, “Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?” 36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” 37 Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

Matthew 27:12 And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.

Mark 15:3 And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing.

Luke 23:9 Then he [Herod] questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing.

John 19:9 Pilate went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, “Where are You from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.

John 19:10-11 Then Pilate said to Him, “Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?” 11 Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.”

Matthew 27:13-14 Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” 14 But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marvelled greatly.

Mark 15:4-5 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, “Do You answer nothing?”

See how many things they testify against You!” 5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marvelled.

Luke 23:28-30 But Jesus, turning to them, said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!’ 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ ”

John 19:26-27 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” 27 Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

Luke 23:43 And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

Matthew 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

John 19:28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, “I thirst!”

Matthew 27:56 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

Mark 15:37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” Having said this, He breathed His last.

John 19:30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

RESURRECTION SUNDAY – Rejected by Man – Accepted by God

Psalm 30:5 Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

The disciples were afraid. There was great sorrow and disappointment when those opposed to Jesus seemed to have got rid of Him. Jesus had told His disciples that they would mourn and weep while the world opposed to God rejoiced, they would grieve but their grief would turn to joy.

1. Rejection

Psalm 118:22 The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Today the world still rejects God's offer of Salvation. We unwittingly identify with the world when we are critical of others and churches that God is using. God seems to delight in using people and methods that the world despises. That Scripture was fulfilled when Jesus rose from the dead. That day, the stone rejected by man became the cornerstone acceptable to God. The Lord turned the very rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and King to be just that, the only way to the Father, the only way to be saved. He did it that very day. Let us rejoice and be glad.

This is a great day of celebration that God has made possible the potential Salvation of everyone, but it only applies to those who believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead and who confess Him as Lord of their lives. **Romans 10:9 For with the heart a person believes and is justified and with the mouth a person confesses and is saved.** Without the cornerstone or capstone, the structure will fall apart. The stone the builders rejected must be the most important stone in your life.

2 Corinthians 5:15 Jesus died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Our old life is past, we live this new life through faith in Christ and it requires daily depending on the risen Jesus. What died? Prejudice, fears, me in control, doing it my way, my values, my priorities, and much more.

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Is this true for you? Is this the most important factor in your life? That you died with Christ, that Christ lives in you and is making every

decision? God can still use you, provided you have rejected the old life and accepted the pattern of the new life. **2 Corinthians 5:17** *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* So, we must submit every action, every thought, every word to be obedient to Jesus.

The Lord Jesus said that John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking but those who were opposed to his preaching were highly critical of him, saying that he had a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking and those opposed to Him called Him a glutton and drunkard. In other words, no matter what happened, those opposed to the good news of Salvation will be negative in attitude and highly critical of the people chosen and the methods used. People do not realise that they are identifying with the devil/Satan who always accuses the believers who overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.

Be careful that you do not join them by being critical of other believers and churches who are making the news of Salvation through Jesus known. God is at work. Accept your role. Let God have His way in others.

2. Acceptance

Psalms 118:23 *The Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes.*

The Lord Jesus rose from the dead. He conquered the grave. He has broken the power of sin and the devil. The rejection of God's way of dealing with sin namely coming into our world and living a sinless life. That very rejection by man of nailing Him to a Cross is God's way of accomplishing our salvation.

Why did God choose this way? So that man cannot claim he has any part in the Salvation of souls. Even in the Salvation of every individual, it is entirely the work of God. Imagine that man's part is rejection. God's part is to take that very rejection of His Son by killing Him on a Cross, burying Him and then God is accepted by raising Him from the dead.

Ephesians 2:8-9 *For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.* None of us can claim that we had a part to play in the Salvation of others or in our own Salvation. God gave us saving faith. God put it into our hearts to respond to Him according to what He has already

done. We are simply those who pass a message on of what God has done to bring about our Salvation. **Isaiah 26:12 Lord, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us.** If people are our converts, they will not last. They must be born again of the Holy Spirit. They must be born of God.

Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! All over the world souls are coming to faith in Jesus today. The Holy Spirit is applying the finished work of Christ on the Cross, His burial and resurrection and Jesus Himself is making His home in the lives of people.

Imagine Jesus chose twelve men to be His disciples. After 3 years with Him, one betrayed Him, another denied Him, and the rest deserted Him. Then Jesus chose Saul, a Pharisee who opposed Him. **1 Timothy 1:15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.** Despite Saul being the “chief sinner”, he became Jesus’ most effective witness and wrote most of the letters or books of the New Testament. God accepted then and now, what man would reject. He is using people of various ages who believe the Bible as God’s final Word. God is able to use old people who have become aware of their frailty provided they rely on Him alone. God has chosen the weak things of this world so that no flesh should glory in His presence. God has said He will not give His glory to another.

God’s way of acceptance: God has declared that the written and expounded Word of God, the Bible will accomplish His purposes. The Bible is the sword of the Holy Spirit. He uses it to convict people of sin, to show them that God so loved sinners that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life.

All over the world people are discovering that the Bible is the Word of God. That if they approach the reading of the Bible as a child, the Holy Spirit will reveal the truths. However, those same truths are hidden from the wise and learned. So, if anyone thinks he knows his Bible and does not need the Holy Spirit to teach him, then God cannot teach him anything and his life will be unproductive. The reading and preaching of the Word of God and relying on one’s self will produce nothing but dried up religion.

In heaven there is no mention of what we have done. Everyone will declare what God has done. How He planned the way of Salvation

before the creation of the world. How He planned the contents of His dealings with man in the Bible and how He kept that Word from being contaminated by man. Everyone in heaven will declare that they owe everything to God. He alone conquered sin, the grave and the devil. He raised up workers that He sent into His harvest fields. He made it possible for them to go. He provided for their needs. He blessed their preaching. He reached others through visions and dreams. All will see that God was at work in the most unlikely situations using the most unexpected means and people that no one else would choose.

3. Victory secured

Psalm 118:24 The Lord has done it this very day. Let us rejoice today and be glad.

Jesus is Lord. He has conquered the grave. The campaign has been won. No purpose of God can be thwarted. We are on the victory side. We receive power, the power of the Holy Spirit. God never changes. We need to discover the way and the means God is using to reach the lost today and complete the work He has begun in them.

Look not at the problems, the difficulties, the opposition, the mocking of others, the majority of the people who are going their own way; instead, fix your eyes on Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of faith. The work He begins He will complete.

We meet people every day. Arm yourself with tracts on Salvation. Be a missionary in your area, in your country. Wherever. Remember we have the answer. The ONLY answer.

God wanted His people to enter the promised land. They saw the problems instead of seeing God who had provided their every need in a semi desert where there was no rain or food. Deal with God. Every next step will seem harder than all that He has delivered you from in the past. Do not put the Lord to the test but trust Him to do what He has promised. Whatever your age or your abilities or your qualifications, offer yourself to God for Him to use you as He pleases.

If God be for us who can be against us.

THE TALL SAUL AND THE SHORT SAUL

Two men with the same origin and name. Both had great potential: one turned out a dismal failure, the other one of the most successful men the world has ever seen.

Tall men are unusual in the Middle East. I was known as Attawiil (the Tall One) or Franji Attawiil (the Tall stranger). Tall people are useful. My wife did not want to marry one who was short, fat or bald, so she got me, and I have been her slave ever since, especially hanging up curtains, pictures and anything high up.

Who was the tall Saul? He came from a wealthy family. He was very handsome. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. He was taller than any other person in his nation. He was a humble man (little in his own eyes) and aware of being of the smallest tribe. He was chosen by God to be the first king. He was given the Spirit of God and became a changed man. When he met Samuel, who anointed him to be king, he was told all that would follow: the men he would meet and what they would bring, he would meet servants of God and the Spirit of God would come upon him. All these signs came to pass. He was told to wait seven days for Samuel to turn up and offer sacrifices and show him what to do.

Saul waited seven days for Samuel. Nothing happened. He was aware of his forces going home so he offered the sacrifice himself and Samuel arrived just afterwards and told him he had acted foolishly. The Lord was looking for a man after His own heart. One who would wait for God even though the situation was critical. One who knew the Lord could use many or few to accomplish His purposes.

A man after God's own heart is a man who first finds out what God wants him to do and then does it. As he keeps obeying, he becomes more and more used by God and his relationship with God develops.

We all need to follow the One who alone knows what He has planned for us. We all find waiting difficult, but it teaches us not to rely on our natural abilities but on God. Saul never found out from Samuel what he had to do and proceeded to make his own decisions. He placed a curse upon any who ate food on a day of battle. Jonathan, his son, recognized the foolishness of his father. God would never have told him to do that. Samuel's advice was not sought. It brought trouble to his soldiers. Saul had acted on his own. We are all like him. We have turned everyone to his own way.

God eventually told Saul to destroy the Amalekites. The trouble is that Saul had failed the first time to do what he was told, and this would continue. He was given specific instructions not to spare any man or beast. He spared the Kenites because they had showed kindness in the past. Saul spared Agag the king of the Amalekites and the best of the animals. God expressed His regret for choosing Saul because he was not obedient.

Samuel prayed all night, but it was no use. Samuel went to see Saul and Saul said, "I have done what I was told to do." (He was not aware of his failure to carry out the will of God. God expected total obedience. Once more Saul acted on his own. He did his own thing. Samuel already knew before he met Saul of his disobedience.)

Samuel replied "What then are the animal noises I hear? To hear is better than sacrifice and obedience better than worship". Samuel told Saul that God had rejected him.

When Saul saw an enemy much taller than himself, he became aware of his limitations and was dismayed and greatly afraid. He did not turn to God. A boy anointed by God with the Spirit of God saw the giant Goliath not as a problem because he saw God. He relied on God and was victorious with a sling and stone. The rest of Saul's life was spent in envying and fearing his successor David. After Saul was spared a second time by David he said, **1 Samuel 26:21** "I have sinned, indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly." It all started to go wrong when he acted on his own without waiting for God to show him what to do. This applies to all of us.

Isaiah 53:6 We have gone astray like sheep and turned everyone to his own way.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death.

Only God knows the way we should take. All of us have to learn to wait for God to show us what to do. If we act without instruction from God, we will bear no fruit even in old age.

The Tall Saul's life ended in suicide. He knew he was going to die in battle, and it filled him with great fear. He consulted a spirit medium contrary to God's warning never to do so. Great potential, great natural ability. Total loss. He would be replaced by a man after God's own heart. David, a shepherd who was anointed by Samuel and lived a life of obedience to God.

The Short Saul was of the same tribe of Benjamin. Historians say he was short, bald with a hooked nose. He was not handsome. He had an eye problem. He was from the upper classes in society, the elite, better educated than most and very religious. He believed that God could not blame him for anything that he had done. He was not aware of sin. He was no spectator but believed in eradicating any threat to his religion. He did not like being defeated in debate and was prepared to agree to murder to silence the opposition. He broke up families and his efforts resulted in many widows and orphans. Yet he was ignorant and in great darkness.

He reckoned without God. On the road to Damascus he came face to face with the risen Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus did not focus on sin in short Saul's life as he was not aware of it. Instead He focused on his ignorance. Jesus deals differently with each one of us according to our background and expectations. Saul asked Him "Who are You?" Then "What would You have me to do?" In contrast to the Tall Saul – that became the theme of his life. He allowed Jesus who had taken the initiative to find him, to continue to lead him. At his meeting with the risen Jesus he was told that he would be a witness of Jesus to open the eyes of Jews and Gentiles; to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God to receive the forgiveness of sins and an inheritance amongst God's people.

Saul went into Arabia and might even have gone to the area of the Midianites in which Mt Musa or Mt Sinai is situated according to Galatians so that he would not be disturbed. He needed time to work through the Scriptures he knew so well and see where the Lord Jesus the Messiah fitted in. There he was taught by the risen Jesus and he said he had received it or was shown by revelation from Jesus.

SAUL AND JESUS IN ARABIA

Saul and Jesus had a One-on-one period of three years in Arabia as Saul needed to be taught by Jesus and have all his questions answered so that he too could carry out the task of an apostle of Jesus.

The following is a suggested conversation between the two of them:

Saul: Jesus of Nazareth, I am sorry for being so hostile towards You and Your followers, I thought You were a threat to my faith as a Jew.

Jesus: Your past and everything you did has been covered by My death on the Cross at Golgotha. Now you have My righteousness and I will treat you as though you never did any of those things.

Saul: I am a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin.

Jesus: I am a Jew of the tribe of Judah.

Saul: Who are You?

Jesus: You know Me as Jesus of Nazareth.

Saul: That is the name You gave me on the road but who are You really?

Jesus: The One that was foretold since the fall of man in the garden.

Saul: Where were You born?

Jesus: What did the Scriptures indicate?

Saul: Bethlehem, but you came from Nazareth.

Jesus: But I was born in Bethlehem because I am of the tribe of Judah. The Roman census required that my family return to their area of origin.

Saul: Who was your mother?

Jesus: I was born of a virgin called Mary, an unwed mother.

Saul: Who was your Father?

Jesus: God. The Holy Spirit came into my mother so that I am both God and man.

Saul: Did you only have a mother to care and provide for You?

Jesus: No. Joseph adopted Me as his son and then had children of his own with Mary.

Saul: How many brothers and sisters?

Jesus: Five.

Saul: What happened at Your birth?

Jesus: Wise men from the East brought gifts that helped meet our expenses as a family and there were also shepherds that came.

Saul: Then what?

Jesus: Joseph was told to take his family to Egypt because Herod did not want another line of kings to compete with him.

Saul: After Your time in Egypt, You lived in Nazareth?

Jesus: Correct. I stayed there until I was thirty.

Saul: Why so long? Was it not a waste of time and did Your family realize who You were?

Jesus: I had to wait until the right time. If I had started My ministry earlier, we would never have met, and you would not be in My service. The time had to be right for Me and those I called to be My disciples. My family are those who love God and do the will of My Father. My biological family thought I was one of them; an ordinary human being, trained to be a carpenter to help provide for the family.

Saul: Why did Your family not notice You were different?

Jesus: Only when My Father and the Holy Spirit lifts the veil of blindness and convicts of sin and opens the eyes of their hearts will they know who I really am.

Saul: Did any come to faith in You?

Jesus: A few, after My resurrection and My stepbrother James will one day write a letter about Me.

Saul: How did You come to select Your disciples?

Jesus: I chose them one by one. Some to lead, some to preach, some to teach, some to one day write about Me. Some are just ordinary men who needed to follow Me and pass on what they saw and heard.

Saul: Not a very bright bunch as far as I can see. Fishermen, a tax collector, fancy him. Only a person like You would call such men.

Jesus: Ouch! Yes, I call such men because they are examples of the difference I can make in their lives. Others will find that out when they respond to My call.

Saul: Did you call some men that are bright and respected?

Jesus: Yes. You know Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and a few Pharisees, and Stephen who tried to tell you the truth about Me.

Saul: With regret I remember him. I had no answer for his presentation and the only way to deal with him was to silence him.

Jesus: Stephen is with Me. You will have to carry on what he tried to do.

Saul: You waited for 30 years before You started your ministry.

Jesus: You waited just as long before I met you on the road!

Saul: Why did You not intervene in my life earlier?

Jesus: You had not studied enough with Gamaliel and you still had to consider yourself as at the peak of perfection.

Saul: Ouch. Knowing You makes everything else seem worthless.

Jesus: You will have lots more “ouches” as you discover more about Me, yourself and all that has been done for you. There is something that never entered your mind before but which you experienced on the road. Grace! The undeserved love of God for sinners who deserved to go to hell.

Saul: I remember reading about that in the Law of Moses. The Lord said He loved His people.

Jesus: Spot on! But you never thought it applied to you; you thought you deserved what God had to give because of your good works.

Saul: Right. You are of the tribe of Judah so you cannot be a priest or high priest because You had to be of the tribe of Levi.

Jesus: You remember what King David said in **Psalm 110:1** “The Lord said to my Lord sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.” Then he said in **Psalm 110:4** “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”.

Saul: I never thought of that although I know the promise and wondered who it would apply to.

Jesus: It applies to the Messiah who would be King like David and Priest like Melchizedek and prophet like Moses.

Saul: I know David was told that his throne would be forever, and his descendants would reign on his throne.

Jesus: I pointed this out to the teachers of the Torah that David said, “The Lord said to my Lord sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” If the Messiah is the son of David, why does David call Him Lord?

Saul: That is who You are. You are Lord and You are reigning, and You showed that by stopping me on the road to Damascus.

Jesus: I am also Priest with a priestly ministry.

Saul: In what way is Melchizedek like You?

Jesus: There is no record of his origin, when his life started. In My case, I am eternal as I said to the people, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” And because of who I am there is no end to My ministry as a priest.

Saul: What offering do you present?

Jesus: I offered My body once for all. It has been appointed for everyone, once to die and after that the judgement, so I offered My body once for the sin of every person in the world.

Saul: So, why are all people not changed by You like You changed me?

Jesus: What I did is to make possible the salvation of all people, but it only applies to those who believe in Me. I do not work in the lives of people as I did in your life because everyone is different. In your case you were ignorant although you thought you knew the Scriptures perfectly. There was a veil of darkness over your mind.

Saul: I agree. After we met on the road, I was blind for three days and it made me realize that I had been spiritually blind.

Jesus: That is why Ananias was sent to you so that the Holy Spirit could come and live in you. Not only was your physical sight restored but the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth will give you spiritual insight and reveal more of Me to you.

Saul: Thank you. There is so much I need to know and so many questions need to be answered.

Jesus: You and I are going to spend three years in solitary just so that I can teach you what I taught My other disciples. Except you will have an advantage. You know the Scriptures better than them and the Holy Spirit who inspired the Torah will inspire you and give you insight.

Saul: But this needs to be recorded.

Jesus: There will be time for you to record what I teach you. One day people who call themselves scholars will read your words **“I passed on to you what I also received” (1 Corinthians 15:3)** and they will think that the other disciples passed on to you what I taught them whereas You got it directly from Me.

Saul: I would need to be undisturbed to record what You teach me.

Jesus: Don't worry. I will organize that. You will have plenty of unhurried time and I will see to it that your letters will be preserved, and the Holy Spirit will use them to reveal Me.

Saul: How could Your dying on a Cross bring about my salvation since the Torah says that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed?

Jesus: You are right. Remember you are under a curse because no matter how hard you tried, you were never able to fully keep the Law and therefore you are cursed. But I took your curse so that you could be free and now through the Holy Spirit living in you, you are able to be saved and please My Father.

Saul: I heard that You taught Your disciples and others who were interested very simply.

Jesus: I had to, because they hardly knew the Scriptures. I had to teach them using parables couched in their culture. I told them that later on I would teach them the truths in greater detail because after My resurrection and the accomplishment of dealing with the sin question and the giving of the Holy Spirit, My disciples would understand with greater insight.

Saul: How do the Gentiles fit into the promise of the Messiah?

Jesus: After the promise of My coming in the prophet Isaiah, you read that the children of the barren woman are more than that of the married woman. This applied to the Gentiles, who will also be brought in.

Saul: I would prefer to speak to my fellow Jews.

Jesus: Indeed, you will, but there will be increasing opposition to your preaching because your message will be a crucified Messiah not a political Messiah. The sin issue is the priority not the nation and dealing with the dominance of Rome.

Saul: Why did you come in my lifetime?

Jesus: It was the appointed time by the Father. The stage was set. Greek is the common language of the Roman Empire and there is some security for the peaceful spread of the good news about what I have accomplished. You are also part of the reason for my coming. You were well taught by Gamaliel who was an objective teacher with a level head and you have a good knowledge of the Scriptures which the Holy Spirit will use and enable you to preach, teach and record

the truth about Me. My death on a Cross was predicted in the Psalms but that was only possible in the time of the Roman Empire which used crucifixion to deal with criminals.

Saul: What will I preach and write about?

Jesus: About Me and what I came to do. The Holy Spirit will help you.

One letter you will write but do not disclose your name so that scholars can waste time talking about who wrote it. They love to do that. They like to write books quoting other scholars to make a living and have lots of degrees. As a Pharisee, you know that.

Saul: You seem to have a real sense of humour.

Jesus: I am always full of joy. I am rejoicing because through My brief spell on earth and the very rejection of Me followed by My burial and resurrection proving that I am the Son of God, millions will come to faith in Me in the future and My Father's house will be full.

Saul: When I read the Torah, the Law, Psalms and prophets, I wonder how they were preserved without error so that it could be trusted as God's Word.

Jesus: The Father, Myself and the Holy Spirit have seen to it that it has not and will not be contaminated by man. When read and studied, if they want to know the truth, we will make sure they do.

In the future there will be the writings of a New Covenant in which you will play a very important role.

Saul: What will I write about?

Jesus: Me. Just Me and how to get to know Me better and share Me with others.

Saul: What about the opposition?

Jesus: There will be many. Just as I was opposed while in My body by the religious leaders and rulers of the empire so in the future many will try to discredit the writings. They will find fault with the style, vocabulary, question the authorship, reject it as the Word of God and this will lead many astray. Those who have a second-hand faith in Me will lose it. Others will seek to find the answers. I know those that belong to Me. None will be lost. No one can pluck them out of My hand or My Father's hand.

Saul: Why do you give them the freedom to lead people astray?

Jesus: Because We give all men freedom of choice to either respond to the truth or reject it. If they reject it and go their own way, we give them up to whatever they desire and their being out of control is an indication that they are under the wrath of God. This applies to both Jew and Gentile. Slave and free. Male and female.

Saul: I am also a Roman citizen with Roman customs and culture.

Jesus: Indeed, you are, and you can use that in conveying the truth about Me. Through sin, all people have become slaves of sin and have lost their sonship. The only way back is through your Roman custom of adoption which is foreign to both Jew and Arab. The Holy Spirit comes into everyone who puts the faith I give them in Me and through His being in them, it is the most natural thing for them to call God Father.

Saul: I understand that. We Jews were promised in Isaiah that the One to be born would be called Everlasting Father. Never thought before of calling God, Father because we recited, "Hear o Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is One." No mention of Father. Thank You that through You, I can call God "Father."

Jesus: The Father finds no fault in you. Because He loves you, I do not need to speak to Him about you because I have already played the role of Mediator. The Father has given Me the role of Judge on that final day.

Saul: So, there is one Mediator between God and man. The man You are, the Man, Messiah Jesus.

Jesus: That is correct. I can play the role of a perfect man because I never sinned, and I know what it is to be tempted in every way as man is but in My case I never sinned. Also, I can be perfect God for that is what I am as Isaiah spoke of My name at My birth, I was called the Mighty God. So, I can play the role of Mediator and you must teach the others this truth about Me and My role.

Saul: We Jews have so many promises, covenants and ways to keep reminding us of our faith. The Gentiles have nothing, no God, no way of remembering what was done for them.

Jesus: That is why at My last Passover meal with My disciples, I instituted a meal using bread as a symbol of My body and wine as a symbol of My blood so that it would remind them of My suffering and

death that is vital for the dealing with their sin. I know people are quick to forget.

Saul: So, I can tell and write to people how You organized the remembrance of You. Something You told me directly.

Jesus: Do not tell them when and how so that the scholars can argue about it. The Pharisees of today will become the scholars and professors of tomorrow and waste a great deal of time with genealogies, speculation, philosophy and knowledge out of books but have little knowledge of Me through personal interaction with Me which we are doing now.

Saul: What about false teaching?

Jesus: Many false Messiahs and false prophets will deceive many. Your fellow Jews will want to insist on the law being maintained with circumcision and all its requirements which made life a burden. You must teach them that the Holy Spirit will enable them to live lives pleasing to God. Teach them that, like Jacob had two names, his old name Jacob and his new name Israel, so will all My disciples have two natures. The old and the new. Both will be at war within. The enemy of your soul, the deceiver and accuser, will encourage the old nature whereas My Father and I and the Holy Spirit will feed and encourage the new nature.

Saul: What else can I pass on?

Jesus: When you preach or write, the Holy Spirit will help you. You could teach them what I taught while never using long words. That people are not only forgiven but like you, the sin is removed, and they are treated as righteous. They are justified by faith alone.

Saul: But after that, how do I express my gratitude?

Jesus: Gratitude is shown by living a holy life which I alone make possible. Later they will call it sanctification.

Saul: What else did You do?

Jesus: It is endless, but I paid the price of buying you back and getting you out of slavery to sin, rules and regulations and brought you into freedom when I brought you to Myself. It will be called redemption by those who translate your letters.

Saul: Why did You speak in parables?

Jesus: So that, using the culture and traditions of the people, I could convey the truths. There is also another reason and that is to hide the truth. Only those who wanted to know the meaning of what I said and came and asked Me personally would have the truth explained to them. Those who were just casual listeners passing by would hear and quickly forget.

Saul: Will only a few Jews come to know You as their Messiah? Is the party over for my people?

Jesus: By no means. Relatively few will come to faith in Me. They will be like a remnant in the time of Elijah and Isaiah but towards the end of time many will respond to Me. They will look upon Me whom they have pierced and realize that it was for their sin I died.

Saul: How do I know that anyone will respond to the message I preach?

Jesus: That is My problem. You preach the truth and the Holy Spirit will convict people of their sin and need of Me, the only one who has dealt with that sin. Just as I chose you, so I will choose others to come to know the Father. People will be born again or born of God. It will be God's doing.

Do not try to be clever. Just state the facts:

- To Jews, show how the promises concerning the Messiah were fulfilled in Me.
- To Gentiles, preach the same message. Many will think it is foolishness and too good to be true.

Saul: I might run out of ideas to make You known.

Jesus: Then just ask Me and the Holy Spirit and keep humble and expectant and fresh truths will be revealed to you and how to present them.

Saul: You know that I am not married and never had children.

Jesus: I will see to it that you will have a very big family. Many fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters and many children.

Saul: Wow! Are You serious? How is that possible?

Jesus: Wherever you go, there I will be with you. The Holy Spirit will cause people to be reborn or born of God and you will have many fathers and mothers to welcome you into their homes and those that come to faith in Me will be your brother and sister and spiritual children who will love to hear you advise them or write to them.

Saul: These are fringe benefits You never told me about when we first met.

Jesus: Sin was too big a problem and you were not aware you are a sinner! Notice I did not mention the subject of sin or how you were treating others. I spoke about what you were doing to Me because when you afflicted My followers you afflicted Me.

Saul: Any more fringe benefits?

Jesus: You will be with Me forever and in My Father's house. It is a great deal better than here in Arabia.

Saul: Well that is why I came to Arabia to Mt Sinai where the law was given, I thought it would be the best place to think things through.

Jesus: You will discover My unsearchable riches.

Saul: From the Torah, the Law and the Psalms and the prophets, I detected Your presence in various ways. Could You give me understanding?

Jesus: I am the prophet promised like unto Moses. I was involved in extricating Israel from Egypt and was referred to as the Arm of the Lord. I met Jacob at the Jabbok River and wrestled with him and gave him a new name. I was the rock that accompanied the people in the wilderness. That is why I was struck once to bring out water to quench their thirst. The next time Moses was not to strike Me because I had already been struck. The third time the rock was invisible when water was received at the wells.

Yes, I was there all the time. I met Joshua before they took Jericho.

Saul: Then You are not only the Arm of the Lord but the Servant of the Lord?

Jesus: Indeed, and I spoke about My fulfilling the promises in Isaiah concerning Myself. It pleased My Father that I suffered.

Saul: How could it please Your Father?

Jesus: There was no other solution as He found no other intercessor and therefore His Own Arm worked salvation for Him and that was Me.

Saul: With all these fringe benefits there must be a catch. Is there suffering involved?

Jesus: All who follow Me will endure suffering of some kind. It is the way that I use to discipline My children as any father does. It will be your

lot as well, but I will be with you and you will complete the race and finish the fight. If you honour Me, I will honour you. Seek not revenge. Leave that to Me.

Saul: What part can I play?

Jesus: You are a tent maker. You can support yourself but when you are unable to do that, I will arrange for others to provide for you.

Saul: I think I would like a visible companion to encourage me along the way.

Jesus: I will see to that. You will never be alone.

Saul: How can one please You and Your Father?

Jesus: The only way to please My Father is to exercise faith in Him and His promises. As for Me, you must discover how to please Me. The joy and peace I give will be an indication that you are giving Me pleasure.

Saul: Why do You not tell us in advance what is going to happen and why?

Jesus: As I told My disciples that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. It is better for you to live one day at a time doing what I ask you to do.

Saul: After these three years I will need to live in my home at Tarsus and share You with others. I will use every opportunity until You call me to serve You.

Saul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision but declared in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea and to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and do works in line with their new way of life. How did this Saul live? He was self-supporting as a tent maker so as not to be a burden to any. In prison, he was thankful when his spiritual children provided for his needs. He tells us that when Jesus died, his old nature died and the life he lived thereafter he lived by faith in (of) the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself for Saul. He wrote that we live by faith and not by sight,

What of his message? He tells us that he was determined to know nothing more than Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Why? So that if anyone was saved, it was a work of God the Spirit and not due to his cleverness or persuasion. He was jealous for all the credit to go to God.

He tells us that there was a constant burden on his heart to keep on preaching the good news of salvation and if he did not do so he would

lose out. “Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.” He hardly ever used a parable about nature. His focus was to publicly proclaim Christ as crucified. God’s way of dealing with sin and all its consequences.

He was prepared to be imprisoned. He wrote inspired letters that are still changing people’s lives today; he was used by God to reveal the details of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. His writings can only be understood with the insight and help of the Holy Spirit. They are on a level with the Old Testament and inspired by the Spirit of God.

He found it difficult to cope with his eye problem but on top of that he was beaten five times, thirty-nine stripes, three times with rods, stoned once, shipwrecked three times, once escaped over a wall in a basket plus numerous other dangers. He never complained. “I have learned to be content; I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” He gloried in his trials and weakness because then he relied more on Jesus.

What did he say at the end of his life as he faced death? **2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge will give me on that Day.** Short Saul looked forward to being with Christ. He said, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Two Sauls. One lost the other saved. One went his own way and sowed destruction, whilst the other sowed salvation for many. The encounter with the risen Lord Jesus was the turning point. Thereafter the short Saul lived in obedience to His Lord and Saviour.

You have great potential. A life lived in obedience to the risen Lord Jesus will be one of blessing for you and others. Have you had a personal encounter with Jesus? Are you living in obedience to Him? Do you submit your plans and goals in life to Him? Have you learned to wait for Him? Saul waited a long time in Tarsus before Barnabas asked him to accompany him in serving Jesus. Only God knows what is best for you.

You, like the short Saul, need an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus. As you receive Him into your life and submit to Him, that must become your whole way of life.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

All will have to give an account of the way they have lived their life.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 God will bring every deed into judgement including every hidden thing whether it is good or evil.

Matthew 10:26 There is nothing covered that will not be made known.

Matthew 12:36-37 Men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have spoken. 37 By your word will you be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned.

Deuteronomy 32:35 It is mine to avenge I will repay.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. 7 This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire.

John 5:44 How can you believe if you receive praise from men yet make no effort to accept praise from the only God.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Judge nothing before the appointed time. Wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.

1 Corinthians 3:6-8 I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase.

2 Corinthians 5:10-11 We must all appear before the judgement seat (bema) of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body whether good or bad. 11 We know what it is to fear the Lord...we try to persuade men.

Romans 2:16 God will judge men's secrets by Jesus Christ.

Romans 14:10 Why do you judge your brother? we will all stand before God's judgement seat.

John 5:22 The Father finds fault with no one but has given all judgement to the Son.

Hebrews 9:27 Appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgement.

Acts 17:31 God has set aside a Day when He will judge the world by the man He has appointed namely Jesus Christ.

Revelation 20:12 I saw the dead standing before the throne and the books were opened.

1 Corinthians 15:52 All will be raised on the final day.

Daniel 12:2 Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall wake some to everlasting life and some to everlasting shame and contempt.

Those that Jesus has chosen to reveal the Father will appear before His judgement seat without fear of condemnation because they are in Christ, who was made sin for them that they might become the righteousness of God in Him. They have to give an account of the life they lived after they were born of God. Their sin had been dealt with but what of the use of the talents, gifts, time, resources? How were they used? What of the words uttered, the money entrusted, who was the focus of life? Was it self or Christ? What were the motives, goals, thoughts? What teaching was received? What teaching was passed on? What subject occupied the mind and heart? How was time spent when no one was looking?

1 Corinthians 3:9 Fellow workers with God. A mystery. Your part. God's part. God will carry out His will. He decides. We work with God as part of His plan.

Psalms 115:3 Our God is in heaven. He does whatever pleases Him.

What do we do? Preach, teach, pastoral care, hear His call, prepare, train, obey, go. God tells us what to say, equips us, opens doors, sends people, works at both ends, namely you and the listener. The Holy Spirit convicts and the salvation of the soul is accomplished.

1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

The foundation is Jesus Christ. The structure is God's building and God's field.

God's part in us:

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.

Hebrews 12:10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.

Chastening: Enforced learning.

Internal: His Word convicts.

External: Through providence, trouble.

Terminal: No longer listening

Our part: Obey and abide; this results in fruit.

Matthew 5:44 Love your enemies, pray for them that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

Matthew 6:20 Store up treasures in heaven.

Matthew 10:42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Luke 6:35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great Give and hope for nothing in return. Paul preached without charge.

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; **3** Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. Count it all joy when you face many trials – without complaining.

1 Corinthians 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. A Christian may suffer loss, but it is temporary.

On that Day we will discover who are saved, who suffers loss and who is rewarded. What is burnt up? False teaching, lifestyle not in harmony with Jesus. Out of God's will. Self-promotion.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Judge nothing before the appointed time. Wait till the Lord comes. Who will bring to light things hidden in darkness? The Lord will expose the motives of men.

Day of clarification. No disputes. No excuses. Hold on to your way, your life and you will suffer loss. No approval from God. No crown to give to Jesus. Ashamed at His coming.

Acceptance of God's verdict. No masks of self and pride. Agree God is right.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 Jesus will come with His angels in blazing fire to punish those who do not know God.

Isaiah 66:15 The Lord is coming with fire.

2 Peter 3:10 Like a thief in the night.

Second Coming. If our conduct is burnt, we will suffer loss. The Work is burnt not the resurrected body.

1 Corinthians 4:3-4 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court indeed, I do not even judge myself. Why? They do not have all the evidence. Jesus said, "Do not be judged or you too will be judged".

Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged. People's opinions are temporary. God is patient. We can and should experience His grace upon grace. God is able to make all things work out for His purposes. Be open to the Spirit. Allow Him to teach you. **Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge my friends but leave room for God's wrath.** God is in control and will succeed.

What was counted important? The praise of man? Personal fame, power, prestige? How was pride handled? What of those in prison. What of those hungry, those poor, the lost, heading for an eternity in hell without God? Did you keep quiet when you came into contact with those who blasphemed the name of Jesus, and those who told dirty jokes, who lived life without hope?

What of those lost in ignorance who had never heard of Jesus and the way of salvation? If you could not go, did you make it possible for others to go? Was your giving known only to you and God? Did you obey Him when He told you to do things that did not fit in with your plans? What percentage of His instructions did you carry out?

How much time did you spend just with Him every day? Did you go to His house of prayer only when it suited you? Did you pray only when there was need?

Supposing Jesus said this to you: Let us put what you did to the test. What did you allow Me to do? Only that will survive the test for eternity. **Isaiah 26:12 You have ordained peace for us for all that we accomplished is what You have done. (NIV) Isaiah 42:8 My glory I will not give to another.** Only what I did through you will survive the test of the power of God. Any act on your part without Me is wood, hay and straw and will be burnt up. It might have seemed good in your eyes, but it was not the will of the Father nor Mine. You uttered many idle words. You did not think at the time it was important, but it had the effect of My not being able to use you when the opportunities came. My power in you had been dissipated by your frivolous talk and jokes. Instead of rejoicing in trials you complained. You found fault with Me and many of My servants and others forgetting that they and you would today appear before Me. You did not know how I was at work in their lives. You saw the outward, never knowing the deep spiritual conflicts on the inside.

However, My grace is greater. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. You were saved by grace. My grace kept you every day. My grace is sufficient in every situation. Only by My grace, can you stand before Me

this day. Shall we see together what My grace accomplished in your life? What I did, or you allowed Me to do, that will last for eternity.

1 Corinthians 15:19 If only in the life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied above all men.

1 Corinthians 9:27 I keep my body under control lest I be disqualified for the prize.

We must see to it that we do not lose what God wants to give us on that DAY.

There are two groups in heaven: Those who received rewards and those who did not. It really does matter how you live your new life in Christ.

Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted. Everything will be known about us on that Day.

Matthew 12:36 Every careless word accounted for.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Judge nothing before the appointed time. Wait till the Lord comes. He will expose the motives of men's hearts. Each will receive his praise from God.

IMPACT OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

John 5:21-22 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will. 22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.

John 5:25 Most assuredly I say to you the hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

John 10:18 No one takes My life from Me but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again.

Luke 22:10-13 And He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. 11 Then you shall say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, “Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” ’ 12 Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.” 13 So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.

Luke 18:31-33 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. 33 They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

Throughout His life, Jesus was preparing His disciples and us.

- He said what would happen at His death,
- who would betray Him,
- how He would be treated in detail,
- who would deny Him,
- who would forsake Him,
- how He would die and
- when He would rise again.

It all happened exactly as He predicted.

Jesus had power to lay down His life and power to take it again. He was in control all the time. He engineered His death by going to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover and told His betrayer to do it quickly. The Passover meal arrangements turned out exactly according to His instructions to His disciples. As was the timing of them meeting a man carrying a pitcher of water saying that they must follow him.

When Lazarus was ill, Jesus delayed His departure and when He arrived at the home of Martha and Mary, Lazarus had been dead 4 days. Why the delay? It was a foretaste of what He would do on the Day of Judgement. He had already told His disciples that the Father judged no one but had given all judgement to the Son. That on that Day, the dead would hear the voice of the Son of God and rise either to eternal life or condemnation. In the case of Lazarus, He would call out to one dead for 4 days and he would rise. In other words, Jesus is always in charge.

Mary believed in the event of the Day of Judgement when all would rise from the dead. Jesus said He is in charge of that Day as He is in charge at the tomb of Lazarus. As He raised Lazarus, so all would rise at the sound of His voice on Judgement Day.

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Two sections:

- **I am the resurrection** applies to **whoever believes in Me will live even if he dies.**
- **I am the life** applies to anyone **who lives in Me and believes in Me will never die.**

Daniel 12:2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Jesus gets her to focus her attention on Himself. Not to think in terms of an event but Jesus Himself. He did this all the time. The Passover meal, His death, His Resurrection. Whatever our situation we should not look at it but to Him. Trust Him. Jesus says He is in charge of the Resurrection.

John 5:28-29 **Those in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.** Those who have done good to the Resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the Resurrection of condemnation.

Jesus is always in charge in every situation, every problem, every crisis and we need to turn to Him instead of trying to sort it out ourselves. We are required to trust Him and allow Him to do what He always does well. We are to play the part He has given us. Martha and Mary had to wait and see Him at work. Jesus is omni-competent.

Today if a person hears the voice of Jesus and responds, he will live and never die. His Word says that He died for our sins. Sin must be punished.

It is either dealt with by the death of Jesus, the sinless Son of God or by an eternity in hell. Either you trust God's way of dealing with sin or you pay for it in eternity never to stop. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. God causes us to realize Jesus died for me and God has no delight in the death of the wicked who land up in hell for eternity. We will all experience the death of the body, but our soul and spirit will never die. Where will you spend eternity with a resurrected body?

He was in charge of His Resurrection. On the first day. He appeared only to those He chose. He left his head cloth on its own, indicating He would return. Therefore we can be sure that He is in charge of giving new life to whom He will.

His death, burial and Resurrection happened as He predicted so what He tells us about the Day of Final Judgement will happen exactly as He said.

Jesus is Lord. He is in control in any and every situation. Even when it does not seem so. While He suffered abuse and crucifixion, He was in control. Is He in every aspect of your life? Trust Him.

I am the life, no one who lives in Me and believes in Me will ever die. We need to live in Christ. What does this mean? We have been connected to Him by faith in Him. It means that a change has taken place. No longer are we in control but Christ. We have become alive in Him after being dead in sin. Now we live daily, dependent on Him for new life. Our aim is to please Him. We can say **Galatians 2:20 I live yet not I but Christ and the life I now live I live by faith of the Son of God (His faith He gives me) who loved me and gave Himself for me.** It has to be a life in submission to the will of Jesus. Under new management.

Apart from Jesus there is no spiritual life that will enjoy life with God for eternity. No other gives life. Someone might say but how can I live in Christ. Deal directly with Jesus. It's as simple as ABCD:

- A. **Admit** that you have gone your own way. You are the boss and your life is a mess and you are miserable inside because of sin.
- B. **Believe** that Jesus died for your sin. To make you clean inside. He rose again to live in you and make you a new person with a fresh start.
- C. **Consider** that every aspect of your life must come under His control. C also means **commit** your life to Jesus; hand it over to Him and allow Him to forgive and begin a new life in you.
- D. **Depend.** Ask Jesus who is on the outside to come in as He promised. As your Saviour to cleanse you, as your Master to direct you and as your friend to stay with you for now and eternity.

Pray this prayer as a whisper to Jesus where you are: Jesus, I admit I have lived without You and I need You. I believe You died for me, for my sin. I believe You rose from the dead and want to come and live in me. Please come in and share life with me. Thank you for coming in. Amen

Tell someone today that you trust Jesus as your Saviour. **Romans 10:9** *If we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead we will be saved.* If we are alive in Christ, we cannot keep quiet. We will tell others that we believe in Jesus.

Jesus said that if we live in Him and believe in Him, we will never die. Believing is not just assent. We cannot keep it to ourselves. We have a message of hope for those who have no hope. We are born of God and thereafter are in Christ and Christ in us. Saved by a God-given faith connects us and keeps us in constant harmony with Jesus. He who has the Son of God, has life. He has passed from death to life and will never die. Amazing! Our bodies wear out and stop but our personality in Christ will never die. **John 3:16** *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Whoever believes in Jesus will not die but have eternal life

We must never forget that there is a Day of Resurrection and of giving an account of our use of the life God has given us. It will be a One-on-one moment. Those who belong to God through faith in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ will not be condemned but have passed from death to life. However, every one of God's children will have to give an account of how they used their lives after He brought them to Himself. Their motives, goals, every idle word, what they used to build on the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their structure will be tested.

Many are content with rewards in this life. Vindication and evidence of this is now! The popularity and praise of men, is now! They have their reward already. Others keep quiet seeking only what the Lord Jesus praises. As He was in control of His death, burial and resurrection, so He stays in control and will be in charge of that Day of Resurrection and judgement.

He knows everything about everyone. Jesus said I am the resurrection. I am in charge on that day. All will bow the knee to Me and confess Me as Lord. All will have to give an account of their lives.

The Bible tells us the following and we would do well to heed the message: **Ecclesiastes 12:14** *God will bring every deed into judgement including every hidden thing whether it is good or evil.*

Matthew 10:26 There is nothing covered that will not be made known.

Matthew 12:36-37 Men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have uttered. 37 By your words will you be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. 7 This will happen when the Lord Jesus will be revealed in blazing fire.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Judge nothing before the appointed time. Wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.

2 Corinthians 5:10 We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body for good or evil.

John 5:22 The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son.

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

Matthew 11:27 Those that Jesus has chosen to reveal the Father will have the righteousness of Jesus, but will have to give an account of their lives.

- If they sought reward on earth they will lose out in heaven.
- If they sought the praise of men, they will not receive the praise of God.
- If they used their tongues in idle chatter and made no mention of Jesus, they will lose out.

How did they use what God gave them? Their lives, their time, their money? What were their motives. Did they feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the weak and visit those in need? How did they build on the foundation of Jesus Christ? What form of structure was built? Was it gold, silver, precious stones or wood, hay and straw? It will be tested by fire. What will survive? Doing the will of God, in the strength of God, for the glory of God will survive the test of the fire of God. What teaching was entertained and what passed on? What occupied your time?

Live every day with that final day in mind. Knowing the fear of God, we persuade men. Jesus is alive. He makes all the difference. He is in charge. In Him we will never die. He is able to keep you from falling and present you faultless before His presence with exceeding joy.

PAUL'S PARABLES

2 Timothy 2:3-8

When you read your Bible, think about what you are reading. Ask the Holy Spirit of truth to teach you and to give you insight. Only check commentaries and what others say after you have allowed the Holy Spirit to give you insight.

When we first came to Jesus, we acknowledged our sinfulness and that we had gone our own way leaving Him out of our lives. We exercised faith in His death on the Cross and resurrection and welcomed Him into our lives. We trusted in Him and what He did. We brought nothing to the party. Then we made a painful discovery. We tried to put things right in our lives only to keep on failing until we discovered that just as we trusted Him for Salvation, so we must keep on trusting Him to complete what He has begun in us. We are to allow Him total freedom to do with us as He pleases and to bring about changes and deliver us from sins like pride, envy, verbal diarrhoea, slander, anger, fear, worry and stinginess, which He deals with; bear in mind that we only become aware later on of the change He has made.

When we become aware of a particular sin, we submit our action/sin to Him and ask Him to deal with it. We take our hands off and let Him deal with it. Our aim is to please Him and do what He tells us to do.



READ

2 Timothy 2:3-8 Be Strong in Grace

v3-4 **Endure hardship like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs.** Jesus endured much hostility from religious people and those who follow Him will experience the same hostility. They will not understand you and might even fear you and what you believe. He wants to please his Commanding Officer. Jesus is our Commanding Officer. Our aim is to please Him. We submit ourselves to His authority and spend our lives discovering what pleases Him. We make our aim to keep listening to Him as our CO and not allow civilian affairs, the society in which we live, its values and demands, to control our thoughts. We are soldiers of King Jesus. His will becomes our will. Where He leads, we follow. What He tells us to do, we do.

v5 **If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.** Who laid down the rules for that race? God.

Doing His will is most important. If there is no obedience, there is no crown. We are all in that race. **Galatians 5:7 You were running well, who cut in on you hindering you?** Why did you stop running well? People imposed conditions and rules of man to make life a burden. Living in the past restricted by rules that hindered rather than spurred progress spiritually. You started by faith in Jesus alone. You continue by faith in Jesus alone. You follow not man-made rules, but God's will for your life.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live but Christ lives in me and the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. I died. I am like a corpse. Helpless, useless, hopeless. I am what I am because of what Jesus did for me and the only way to live for me is to keep trusting in Jesus to complete what He began in me.

v6 **The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.** Who is the farmer? Does he represent Jesus or me? It must be me as I am the soldier and the athlete. If it is me then I will be the first to realise the difference that Jesus brings about in my life. Changes will take place in your life when you hand yourself and all you have unconditionally over to Him. Anger, pride, misuse of the tongue, love of money, seeking popularity and praise from people. Lose their power and control in your life. Each one of us has a weakness, a failure, a sin that dominates us. It could be the fear of the unknown, of death, valuing things rather than people. The love of money.

v8 **Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my Gospel.** Why are we told this? Because Jesus told us to do that. To remember Him. To remember who He is and what He has done for each one of us. What did He do? He endured hardship, opposition, hostility from family, society, the religious leaders, which cost Him suffering and death. He left us an example and we accept it is our lot that we too will face a hostile world. But we remember Jesus the Messiah raised from the dead. Triumphant over sin and death. He who accomplished our salvation by His suffering and death is risen and is alive. He is our CO. Of the line of David, the fulfilment of all Messianic prophecy. The only one, unique, Son of God, Son of Man who will one day return for His own who remain faithful despite persecution and opposition.

So just as Jesus is our example and CO in verse 3 and verse 8, we keep our focus on Jesus. Allow Him to tell us what to do. Allow Him to order our lives. We will take the bread and wine/juice to remind us of Him but every day He must be our all.

Be honest with yourself. Be honest with God. Admit how you fail over and over regarding the same thing. Admit you cannot change and praise Jesus that He can change you.

I want to please Him and not myself or people. It is no longer I that lives but Christ that lives in me. He lives, He lives, Jesus is alive in me.

Where is Jesus? Have you met Him? Is He in you?

PRACTICAL LESSONS IN Hebrews 3



READ

Hebrews 3:1-6 The Son was Faithful

We are told that Moses was faithful in his responsibility as a servant, but Jesus was faithful as the One who owned the house. We who put our trust in Jesus are part of His house IF we persevere in our confidence in Him.



READ

Hebrews 3:7-19 Be Faithful

This passage is to do with complacency.

Today occurs four times: it teaches that it means NOW, right now, in this place, at this time which should be our response when the Lord is trying to get through to us. Do not do all the talking but expect the Lord, the Holy Spirit to witness with our spirit. Learn to listen.

Problem + prayer + reading and mediation of the Word
MINUS my own ideas = SOLUTION!

Today is the age of grace. Every day with God is *today*.

Harden not your heart occurs four times: it is of great importance. Why? Because we are part of the house or church whose head is the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we are people who prefer to go our own way. It was our previous way of life. We were the boss. We made the decisions. We based our decisions on common sense. When in our need we cried out to God to deliver us, a new voice, that of the Lord the Holy Spirit tried to make Himself known. He wants to be involved.

The Holy Spirit says “Today when you hear His voice, harden not your heart.” Every time you fail to respond to the gentle Holy Spirit, you not only grieve Him, but you harden your heart making His voice fainter until it is extinguished. We harden our hearts through the deceitfulness of sin. Sin is going your own way. When we keep hardening our hearts the Lord might one day say, “they always go astray, they never listen to Me, they shall not enter My rest.” For this reason, many know nothing of the voice of the Lord. The author of the Old Testament is the Holy Spirit. In this New Testament book, the Holy Spirit is using a passage from **Psalm 95:7-8 For He is our God and we are the people of His pasture...Today, if only you would hear His voice, 8 “Do not harden your hearts...”**

Whose voice? The voice of the Lord. Some might say I have never heard the voice of the Lord. How can you hear the voice of the Lord?

This Psalm was used in the synagogues at the time of Jesus to introduce the worship on a Sabbath. Therefore, we must ask what it was there for.

Note: God takes the initiative. He speaks and our response is not to harden our hearts. God does not only speak when we make requests. The Lord speaks to teach, to guide, to comfort, to rebuke and we must be prepared to listen and learn. We might decide on our own what to do but the Lord might have something totally different in mind. Good works which He has prepared in advance for us to do.

When we pray and ask the Lord for His direction, His Spirit witnesses with our spirit. Ideas and thoughts come into our thinking. This should not be an isolated experience and only in times of great trial or stress.

Jesus said that He asked His Father what to say and how to say it. **John 12:49-50** For I did not speak on My own, but the Father who sent Me commanded Me to say all that I have spoken. 50 I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say. If Jesus relied on His Father for the details of His life, then we too need the participation of the Lord in the details of our lives.

We started well by handing our lives over to the Lord and responded to the Gospel by the hearing of faith, receiving the Holy Spirit. We need the presence and participation of the Lord every day of our lives.

We are told to test the spirits. How do you know if your thoughts, convictions and impressions originated from the Holy Spirit?

Ask yourself:

1. Is it **Scriptural**? Words from the Holy Spirit are always in harmony with the *Scriptures*: the Bible.
2. Is it **Right**? Thoughts from God are always *right* and will stand up to every test.
3. What is it's **Providence**? God speaks through His *providence/wisdom*. He opens the door and we follow, and we can totally rely on His leadership.
4. Is it **Reasonable**? Directions from God are *reasonable*. In accord with common sense, although it may not always seem so.



READ

Numbers 14:1-22 Israel Refuses to Enter Canaan

This passage has to deal with the period of the Exodus from Egypt and the time in the wilderness. Ten times the people were led by the Lord and ten times they complained and failed to exercise faith.

They complained about their physical situation, the bitter water, the lack of water, the lack of food, the type of food, the lack of meat, the leadership of Moses, the problems of the future. For 40 years, they never grew spiritually, even though they were redeemed out of the house of slavery by a great deliverance with many signs and wonders from the Lord God.

Now the Holy Spirit says to THAT generation, as a result of their constant hardening of their hearts by going their own way, that they came under the anger of God; their whole way of life was going astray, going their own way and God promised they would never enter His rest.

The New Testament regarded the Christian life as a new Exodus.

Luke 9:30-31 And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke to Jesus of His decease (departure) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus about His Exodus.

1 Corinthians 5:7 The Lord Jesus is our Passover Lamb.

1 Peter 1:19 Jesus is a lamb without blemish. Many Exodus allusions.

1 Corinthians 10:11 These were written for our instruction.

Hebrews has the same theme. A good beginning but the need to persevere. Hebrews was written nearly 40 years after the departure of the Lord Jesus, to people who had been redeemed by Him. However, it was so easy to become complacent. I am saved by the blood of the Lamb. Now I can relax and live life without getting too involved. Today when you hear His voice, harden not your heart.

Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 24:13** He who endures to the end shall be saved.

Hebrews 3:6 Christ...whose house we are if we hold fast our confidence and the rejoicing of the hope.

Hebrews 3:14 We have become partakers of Christ IF we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

Perseverance is a sign of a true disciple of the Lord Jesus. We began our new life by responding to the Holy Spirit. We live by faith and not by sight. We need to continue to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:14 As many as are led by the Spirit of God these are sons of God.

RUNNING THE RACE

Hebrews 12:1-11



READ

Hebrews 12:1-2 The Race of Faith

Most of us are spectators these days but according to the Bible we are in the arena and all the saints of old are the witnesses (spectators) who had proved the faithfulness of God urging us on.

Galatians 5:7 You did run well, who hindered you? Have you lost your early zeal, your joy, your enthusiasm? What caused it? A comfortable lifestyle, contented home life, hobbies, sport, desire for other things?

Sin: we are in a race. There are temptations all along the way to take a short cut, to go your own way and do your own thing. Take back the control of your life.

The race is set before us; it is not of our choosing but God's. Each one's race is different. It is a lifetime race, so let us run with endurance. A good start needs a well-maintained pace.

One day at a time. Blessed is he whose strength is in the Lord whose heart is set on pilgrimage. Jesus wants to share every day with us but waits for our request daily.

Look unto Jesus (Greek: looking away from others). Direct your gaze on Jesus. It is impossible to do as a chameleon does: look in two different directions at the same time.

Focus on the man Jesus. He is one of us who has finished the course as the perfect man.

Jesus is the originator and perfecter of our faith. **Philippians 1:6** He who has begun a good work in you will complete it. Salvation is His business. Jesus leads by example; He is there running with us.

Jesus always had joy. But He saw what lay beyond the Cross. **Matthew 26:64** You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Isaiah 53:11 He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

He experienced the shame but lost sight of it with the joy of the salvation of souls.



READ

Hebrews 12:3-11 The Discipline of God

Consider Him. Think of every aspect until you have the complete picture. Sinners were hostile in words towards Jesus Himself.

We are not to lose heart over a period of time – life is a long time. Keep your focus on Jesus. **2 Corinthians 3:18** We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Christians who have been changed by Jesus have a struggle against sin – there is an inner conflict, but it has not yet cost us our lives.

Have you forgotten: **Proverbs 3:12** For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

Do not count yourself as unimportant nor be discouraged: whom the Lord loves, He disciplines. This is nothing new. It is a sign of His love and also that you belong to Him.

If there is no discipline, you are not a son! Fathers discipline their children “for a few days” as they see best, they correct their bad behaviour but God corrects us for our good. What form does the discipline take? **2 Chronicles 32:31** The Lord withdrew from him that He might test him that He might know all that was in his heart. Hezekiah showed all that was in his house. He could have spoken of how the Lord had delivered him from the Assyrians and how He had healed him. Instead he spoke about what he was proud of.

God has to remind us over and over that we owe our new life and every aspect of it to Him.

We need to be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live. As we subject ourselves to a natural father, so our spiritual welfare is through a spiritual Father. Only through Jesus do we come to the Father. Then as our spiritual Father, He must discipline us, and we must gladly accept that as part of our lives to share His holiness. To be like Him.

Deuteronomy 8:15-16 God led them in the wilderness, provided water out of a rock, 16 fed them with manna, to humble them and test them and do them good in the end.

A child is helped by parents to take his first steps. Then they let go and allow the child to step out on his own. That is what the Lord does. At first, He protects and helps the newly converted, then allows them to step out

on their own. They lose the sense of joy and His close presence, but will they continue to trust Him through His Word, through fellowship with His people? Will they continue the habits of prayer, reading and worship?

Psalm 42:2-5 My soul thirsts for God for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? **3** My tears have been my food day and night while they continually say to me “where is your God?” **5** Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me. Hope in God for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.

What has happened? He has entered a period of spiritual drought. God seems far away. His word yields no blessing. He longs for God Himself and is determined to praise God despite the way he feels.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me lest I be exalted above measure. **9** The Lord said to me “My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” **10** When I am weak then am I strong. A form of discipline to keep Paul humble, to deal with the temptation of pride. To keep him dependent on the Lord.

1 Peter 5:5-6 “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” **6** Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He might exalt you in due time.

Deliverance is only when we have learned the lesson:

1. The desire to read God’s Word is not natural but the work of the Holy Spirit.
2. The desire to pray is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit.
3. Sharing your faith in Jesus with others is the work of the Holy Spirit.
4. Showing hospitality, exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not natural.

We need to remember that God wants to do us good in the end. He knows the danger of prosperity and pride. No discipline seems to be joyful for the present but painful nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of (belonging to) righteousness.

No peace without righteousness: the result of holiness.

A CHALLENGE TO LIVE A NEW LIFE

Our Part and God's Part

Our part: Obedience to the truth.
Response to the Word of God.

God's part: He has purified your soul.
That we be born again, born of God.

Both words purified and born again are perfect tense.
One, a decisive act in the past, the other continues in the present.

What has happened? You have heard the word of truth and been obedient to it resulting in forgiveness, being made clean spiritually and given a new start, a spiritual rebirth.

What was the word you heard? It was the Word of God that never becomes obsolete but is relevant in every place and time. The good news is confidence in the faithful God who never changes.

In contrast to the living and abiding Word of God, people wither and die. They experience a brief spell of glory but are then dead and forgotten.



READ

1 Peter 2:1-3 Our Inheritance Through Christ's Blood

v1 **Therefore:** that is why we have to backtrack because of what is to follow. This is "our part", because a change in behaviour must take place. We are forgiven and have a new start, born of God.

Malice: the vicious nature which is aimed at doing harm to others.

Deceit/guile: outward behaviour to please others but inward self-interest.

Hypocrisy, envy: both plural, resulting in finding fault with others.

Laying aside: (throwing off, getting rid of, a conscious act on our part), these are aspects of the old nature. Requires discipline on our part. When God makes us aware of sin, to ask His help in dealing with the old nature. Truth revealed must be applied to take effect.

Speak evil of no one: James 4:11 Do not speak evil of another. James 5:9 Do not grumble against each other. God does not find fault with His children. They are complete in Christ, they have the righteousness of God. Therefore, rather concentrate on the positive. We are all sinners in daily need of grace. Because we have been born of the Word of God, we belong to a new family.

Instead of being negative towards our family members, we should be positive towards spiritual growth and that will result in us being positive towards our new family.

- v2 **New-born babes:** Revealed to children, we need to remain receptive. The Father will only teach those who come like children to Him to understand the truths of the Bible.

A new-born babe just receives. Babies feed on milk. Spiritual milk which is without guile for the mind and heart. It is the Word; the same word that resulted in new birth. The Holy Spirit using the Word of God causes growth. The Word without the Spirit results in unproductive knowledge.

- v3 **Since you have experienced the kindness of the Lord:** Very personal. Drawn into a relationship with the Lord into a priesthood.



READ

1 Peter 2:4-10 Our Inheritance Through Christ's Blood

- v4 **Coming to Him:** in Greek means to draw near with the intention of staying and enjoying a relationship. Also a proselyte; One who draws near, a Gentile who becomes a member of God's family, this applies to us. Who made the difference? Christ Jesus.

Living Stone: Why living? He is a Person and raised from the dead. Who is the Stone? The Messianic promise.

Rejected indeed by men: He did not fit their expectations of the Messiah; rejected by the religious leaders.

Chosen by God: God chose Him to be the fulfilment of all Messianic prophecy and regarded Him as of great value. Arrogance of Christians? No! Only what is acceptable to God counts.

Precious: Highly esteemed. Met the requirements to accomplish God's purpose.

How is it that you came to this living Stone? Why are you not part of the majority that rejected Him? Because you were born again of the Word of God that is alive all the time. The difference is because God did a work in you when you responded to the good news of salvation. God enabled you to respond. He gave you the faith to accept the truth.

- v5 **Living Stone:** What happened when you came to the esteemed living Stone by God? You became like Him. Peter (Greek πέτρα = petra = small stone). Peter knew that, before he was a dead Peter, now he is a

live Peter. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter you are a stone and I want many more similar living stones to build My church. People enter Christ's church by coming to Him and NOT by entering a church to be joined to Christ.

Spiritual house: God's chosen sanctuary today is His people, not a building.

Holy priesthood: Not for a select few but all who come to Christ and all can worship and lead.

Offer up spiritual sacrifices: To God through Jesus Christ. No longer animal or on certain occasions but every day. DAILY obedience, praise and thanksgiving and practical helping of others. Now all of these are acceptable to God because they are done through Jesus Christ, no other.

v6 **The chief cornerstone:** Christ Jesus can either be the chief cornerstone or He can be a rock to trip over. Either the most important foundation of salvation, the head of the corner or the final sentence to eternal condemnation.

Psalm 118:22 The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

Isaiah 8:14 And He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin (trap) and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily."

Those who accept the Living stone themselves become living stones in God's new temple on earth; the church. He who believes in the Elect One of God will never be put to shame.

Matthew 7:23 Jesus will say "Depart from Me I never knew you". Those who know not Jesus as Lord will be turned away.

How did we become part of this new temple? We are elected by God according to the foreknowledge of God. Israel were the elect of God but now those who trust in God's Messiah become His elect.

Acts 2:23 Him being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by wicked hands, have crucified and put to death.

Unlike the Old Testament temple, the Gentiles are an integral part of the new temple: the church.

v7 **He is precious:** Why is Christ precious to the elect of God? Because they owe everything to Him. Redemption, sanctification, One who begins a work and completes it. Who never gives up! But those who are disobedient are actively rejecting and opposing His will. Why? Because they rejected the message, God's solution resulting in judgement. People will be in hell because of a choice they made. Unless God intervenes in a person's life.

v9 **An elect people:** a priesthood in the service of the King, a people set aside for God's purposes.

His own special people: God's own possession to make known the virtuous qualities of God.

Out of darkness into His marvellous light: His character and behaviour in bringing both Jew and Gentile out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Christ The Holy One of God, the High Priest on the throne – shares all with His people. All through Christ alone. ALL – male, female, young, old, teenager, weak, strong, handsome, ugly.

We are called to proclaim to everyone else who God is, what He has done and what He can do. We are not saved just to belong to God. We cannot keep quiet. If Jesus be God and died for me then nothing He requires of me can be too great. He called us out of darkness to light. I CAN SEE!!

v10 **Once not a people but are now the people of God:** The Gentiles were once under wrath, but are now forgiven.



READ

1 Peter 2:13-17 Submission to Government

Why are we strangers in the world? Because we belong to God. We're not here to stay, we're just passing through. Sinful desires are an attempt to lure us away from our new family.

Think in terms of the day when we will all have to give an account. Those opposed will admit that your good deeds were the result of being members of God's family.

v13 **Human Authority:** Submit yourself because you belong to God. Treat with respect authorities who rule over you. Good behaviour by God's family will silence opposition.

v16 **Live as free men:** In submission to authorities but free because you do not belong to them. You are the servants of God. Christ has set us free.

v17 **Show respect to everyone:** Recognise the respect due to those in authority. Salute not the man but his rank. Love the family of God.

Fear God. Honour the king: Submit to those over you in the Church.



READ

1 Peter 2:18-25 Submission to Masters

v18 **Slaves:** Owned with no rights. Submit, obey, respect irrespective of their character because he is aware that as a member of God's family, he is serving God. He is doing it in the conscious presence of God. God is aware of unjust suffering and your response to it. It's not what happens that is important but your response.

You were called to endure opposition following the example of Christ who suffered at the hands of wicked men and did not retaliate. He never sinned even under great provocation. Why? Because He was mindful that God knew the facts and it was better to trust God than fickle man.

The Messiah lived in submission to the will of God. Why did Christ die? That we might die and live for righteousness. He died that we might be forgiven and healed. When sin is dealt with, inner healing takes place.

Like straying sheep. Why? Because there is no shepherd, but the Shepherd and Overseer are once more in control.

This last section has been all about submission:

- Submission to God.
- If Jesus is not Lord OF ALL He is not Lord AT ALL.
- Submission to the teaching of the Bible.
- Submission to His will daily.
- Submission to one another out of love for Christ, ourselves, your servants for Jesus's sake. He who would be great must be the servant of all.
- Submission to the government, rules of society, rules of the road,

Submission to God:

- Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send workers into His harvest. Be willing to go if He singles you out. His will is different for each individual as He completes the work He has begun in you. Overseas or home. It remains His choice, not yours.
- Pray for personal guidance. The Lord has control over where you go and what you buy. You might have problems, habits and a different background and a pattern of behaviour that has to be changed.
- Time Management. Submission to God in the way you use your time, where you go, what you read, how you spend your money, the needs of others, how much time you spend studying the Bible and in prayer. Sharing your faith with others.

God might have to deal with your fear of others. Your behaviour to the opposite sex. Your thought life. Your talk. No wonder that so few talk about their Saviour when they spend their time talking about the economic situation, the government and the decisions made by bad referees.

LIVING BY THE INVISIBLE IN THE VISIBLE

We live in a visible world that believes abundant life depends on abundant possessions. The more you have, the more content you will be.

Jesus spoke of the deceitfulness of wealth. It is like a lure to grab our attention to be like the rest of our society. Secure job, secure income, secure possessions, secure future.

Our society organises insurance in case of disaster based on the fears of people. Insurance of our house, possessions, pension provision, health insurance, life itself, etc. to deal with every aspect of life so that there is no need of God.

There is another life. **THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.** The emphasis is on the *righteous* and how they live. Faith is invisible. Faith in the invisible God working unseen and unknown and quietly as though He is not doing anything and is not in control.

This phrase is repeated three times in the Bible:

1. The first teaches that **life with God begins by faith and he who is righteous by faith shall live.**

Habakkuk 2:4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Habakkuk cried out to the Lord about the wickedness of his society and why God appeared to be doing nothing. It was distressing to him. God made him aware of the evil in his society which He allowed to go unchecked. He was honest with God, almost rude but he needed answers.

God replied to Habakkuk personally that He was indeed at work. It would astonish Habakkuk who found it hard to believe. By raising up a powerful nation, the Chaldeans would be His instrument to punish the rejection of his society of the requirements of God.

This was most unexpected. This he could not understand. Like every good teacher he went from the *known* of God to the *unknown*. That is how to deal with every problem.

God is holy and there is no sin in God so how could He use a nation more wicked than His own people to carry out His wishes in punishment. The wicked devouring one more righteous than he.

Habakkuk said he would wait with expectation that God would correct his lack of understanding. God replies and tells Habakkuk to write down His response. Why? Because it is very important for all.

God would act in His *appointed time*. “Habakkuk it is not for you to understand what I am doing but for you to trust Me that I know what I am doing and I am in control.” The just shall live by faith.

“Habakkuk, there will be times and events that you will not be able to understand. How the sovereign all powerful God allows you to go through experiences that you do not understand. The only way for you then is to keep trusting Me. I know what I am doing and no purpose of mine can be thwarted.”

Sometimes God tells His servants to do things that are contrary to common sense. They are not to ask for an explanation but obey.

Habakkuk was told to wait even though there was an unnecessary delay in his schedule. Wait, for it will happen. Waiting is never easy. God is always on time and seems to take longer than expected.

Those who wait for the Lord will be blessed, they will not be ashamed to act hastily, and they will renew their strength to walk, run and soar. Why wait? We wait for the Shepherd to lead. When we act on our own and do not wait for the Lord, we mess things up because only He knows the future and the needs thereof.

2. The second teaches that it is **ongoing from faith to faith**.

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

The emphasis is on how we live. By faith.

What is the good news? That God has dealt with the barrier between Him and man: Sin. A disease we all have, and sin is the outworking of that disease. He has also taken the punishment and is able to treat those who respond in faith as though they have never sinned.

What is justification? More than acquittal; it is approval. As though we had never sinned. We have the righteousness of the only One who never sinned: the Lord Jesus Christ.

The righteousness of God is evident in a person's life as he exercises faith in God who is in control of his life. When God is not in control, He allows people to do as they like.

Faith does not earn anything. There is no merit in faith. We are just using what God has given us. A vacuum. Faith connects. We exercise the saving faith that God has given us. Thereafter we live by exercising faith in the Lord Jesus.

Martin Luther discovered through the "Just shall live by faith" that the way of salvation was not through his efforts but through trusting what God had done for him. It was the start of the Reformation.

John Wesley read Luther's preface to the book of Romans and found his heart strangely warmed that he did believe that Jesus Christ died for him and it resulted in a revival in the UK.

For us there is no other way to live the new life of Christ. Paul wrote to the Galatians that they began their new life and received the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ. The way ahead was to continue to exercise faith. Paul shared his own experience. [Galatians 2:20 The life I now live I live by faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.](#) Saving faith is a gift of God.

Our tendency is to turn to God only when the problem is greater than our resources.

3. The third declares that **there is no alternative to the life of faith if we are to please God.**

[Hebrews 10:35-39 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. 36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. 37 "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." 39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.](#)

This is the third mention. Do not cast away your confidence which has great reward, for you have need of endurance so that after you have done the will of God you may receive the promise. For yet a little while He who is coming will come and will not delay. We are not of those who draw back to destruction but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. Emphasis on faith.

Slightly different to the other two verses. My righteous one. A person who belongs to God, who is righteous because of what God has done for and in him. For him there is no alternative to living by faith. It is the only way of life that pleases God. Stop trusting in God and going your own way results in no pleasure for God and spiritual loss. Is this a warning of the wrath of God?

Keep trusting because of what lies ahead: A great reward. He does not go into detail, but like God promised Abraham “I am your shield, your exceeding great reward”, so the promise is to those who have come in contact with God by faith. Hang in there, do not give up.

There are times when nothing is happening. Accept God’s delays, His ordering. There is a long road ahead. Only God can reveal His will for your life, and you need to do it until He guides you on the next step.

“Yet a little while” – 2000 years later but a 1000 years is like a day to God. He will come and will not delay.

He shall continue to trust Me because he knows what I am doing and can leave it to Me. But if anyone draws back, if he stops trusting Me then I, God, will have no pleasure in him. Sometimes things happen that make us question whether we heard God correctly. Our natural instinct is to make us want to go our own way and stop looking to God for guidance. There is no alternative to the life of faith, of trusting God.

The just shall live by faith.

A NEW COVENANT

Everyone can make a fresh new start in life. God has made this possible. What God has planned long ago, He has carried out.

Jeremiah 31:31 “Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”

Jeremiah 32:38 I will be their God and they will be My people.

Hebrews 8:11-12 “No longer will they teach their neighbour or say to one another ‘know the Lord’ for they will all know me from the least to the greatest” declares the Lord. 12 “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Hebrews 10:16 I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

The Lord takes the initiative:

- I will make a new covenant.
- I will be their God.
- I will forgive.
- I will put my law in their hearts.

The Lord works in everyone and all will know Him personally. Sins will be forgiven and forgotten by the Lord. HOW? It will be His work. He does not say how, but He will do it. **1 Corinthians 2:9** Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. These are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit.

It is the person of the Holy Spirit who makes the New Covenant applicable today. Each person is different, so the Lord deals differently. One-on-one. He needs to be present. God takes the initiative in all our lives. He takes His time. Eventually we respond but He makes it clear it is all His doing so that no one can say “I did it.”

In Isaiah, the new covenant with Israel would extend to the nations including the Gentiles. **Isaiah 49:6** I will make You a light for the Gentiles that my Salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. God promised a new covenant not like the old one but totally new in which He would write His law in our hearts. What is the new covenant? How does God work and accomplish His purposes which the Old Covenant failed to do?

The New Covenant is seen in action in the book of Acts, in The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. He calls, directs and reminds us of the words of

Jesus. He lives in every believer in Jesus, not just a few like in the old covenant.

Listed below are some of the changes from the Old Testament to the New Covenant.

1. Old Testament: The Passover was celebrated once a year.

Exodus 12:2-12 This month shall be your beginning of months. 7 And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts. 11 It is the Lord's Passover.

New Covenant: This has been replaced by the Breaking of bread which is done as often as we like. There is no stipulation. We have the freedom to remember what Jesus did, in any place and as often as we like!

1 Corinthians 11:26 Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

2. Old Testament: The Place of worship, The Temple, was important. Certain feasts were celebrated at certain times in certain places.

Deuteronomy 12:5-6 But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. 6 There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.

New Covenant: Worship can take place anywhere, and at any time, according to the Scriptures of both Old and New Testaments, but the New Testament revealed that there was no longer any need to go to Jerusalem. You can now meet God in your room, alone with Him. You live by faith in His presence all the time.

John 4:21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father."

3. Old Testament: Sabbath of rest and worship.

Exodus 16:23 Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.' "

New Covenant: We meet on the first day of the week celebrating the resurrection. We do not value one day above any other day because

all days are ones of worship and service. Whoever considers one day special does so to the Lord. This is a One-on-one with God. Freedom to allow Him to deal differently with every one of us. It should not divide the church. We can meet with the Lord every day and serve Him every day. We can remember His birth, life, sufferings and present state any and every day. In the New Covenant this principle applies in all aspects of the truth. The Lord, the Spirit has the final say and He will never go contrary to His Word. We should ask Him to teach us so that everyone is fully convinced in their own mind. Not man but the Lord has the final say.

Romans 14:5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

4. Old Testament: The relationship with God has an intermediary.

Leviticus 1:3-5 If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd...he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord. 4...it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. 5 He shall kill the bull before the Lord; and the priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

New Covenant: We know God as *Father*. This is only possible through faith in Jesus as your sacrifice of atonement. The Father finds fault with no one who has responded to the invitation of the Lord Jesus. No wrath. Fear is gone. The Father provides for His children, responds to their requests and advises them if they ask His help. Give Him the freedom to order your life. Accept it without complaining. If you know not God as Father, then the wrath of God abides on you and you will meet Him as judge.

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

5. Old Testament: Did not recognise Jesus as the Messiah.

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

New Covenant: We know Jesus as Saviour and Lord and High Priest. He paid for your deliverance by living a perfect life and then dying in your place. You belong to Him. You learn to discover what pleases Him. You submit all your actions to Him. As Jesus asked His Father what to say and how to say it, so He expects us to involve Him in everything we do.

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

6. Old Testament: The Holy Spirit was with God.

Isaiah 63:10 But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them.

New Covenant: We are commanded not to be filled with wine but with the Holy Spirit. What does this mean in everyday life? The Holy Spirit lives in all those who are born again. He changes people as they keep trusting in Jesus. But He does not get involved unless we say that we need Him to understand His Word, to live a life that pleases Jesus. He will guide us into all truth. We acknowledge the Holy Spirit but know so little about Him. We emphasise the Lordship of Jesus and obedience to the scriptures while not knowing how we can be filled with the Holy Spirit. He needs to be Lord. He needs to fill every aspect of our lives. He too will not intrude but wait for us to invite Him to play His role of exalting the Lord Jesus Christ. Some are afraid of the Holy Spirit because of the excesses of others. He is gentle, works quietly, teaches the truth by passing on what He has received from Jesus.

When you speak to any one of the persons of the Triune God, The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit, you are dealing with all three. We must not stipulate how God must operate, or what gifts He gives to build up the body of Christ the church. Do not harden your heart when you hear His voice. Obey and His whisper becomes more discernible. He is Lord. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. He must fill His temple. The Holy Spirit will witness with your spirit.

John 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

Listed here are other changes that we see in our New Covenant with God:

1. **Praying with others for others.** Paul asked for prayer to be bold in preaching, for deliverance from evil men opposed to the good news. The good news is for all men, not just the Jews but all the nations. Allowing God to make use of us to make Him known.
2. **Allowing God to continue to take the initiative in your life:** We tend to have a fixed time and place to pray. We should tell the Lord that He has the freedom to order how He deals with us. Allow Him to prompt you to pray. When the Lord is Lord and given freedom to lead, there

is a freshness in the relationship. Left to ourselves it becomes boring, with the same pattern every day. Allow God to break the monotony. Wherever you are, in the house, garden, car, or places of God's creation, respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit just to chat to the Lord, and counting on His presence all the time.

3. **Obey Jesus' instruction:** Make disciples of all nations. Make use of every opportunity until God calls you and sets you apart. Philip the evangelist went to Samaria and God blessed his preaching. Then the Lord called him to go to the road that leads to Gaza, to meet the Ethiopian Eunuch. Barnabas and Saul got involved together and then were called by the Holy Spirit for the work He had planned for them. They were an effective team. The world was their vision not just the local assembly. Fit into God's plans; do not ask God to fit into your plans.
4. **Be prepared for the unexpected:** Be willing to be uprooted. Paul was warned that he faced imprisonment and he accepted it. God caused him to write letters which continue to witness to us today. God has strange ways of teaching us about Himself. Do not limit Him by past experience.
5. **No teaching on tithing:** Allow the Lord to give you liberty in giving as He loves a cheerful giver. Giving is unknown to others except the Lord. We have a Saviour to share with others. Some One to pass on worth more than gold. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than receive. That is a fact to be discovered.
6. **Let the Word of Christ make its home in you:** Read it, learn it, memorise it. The Holy Spirit uses it in your life. Apply it. Make up for lost time. Doing nothing? Read the Bible. Ask God to teach you the truth. Pass on what you discover to others.

A new covenant. Do not be hampered by the old. Nor think in terms of the old. Find out how God is reaching this generation. Then do it!

Everyone is to discover the Lord's will on every issue. Accept that the Lord will show others differently, but the Bible is the final authority. Some issues are what God has shown just to you, but this must not cause division. It is intended to make your faith personal, relevant and practical today.

- Walk humbly with God.
- Be not wise in your own eyes.
- Acknowledge your need of Him at all times.
- The just shall live by faith in God and His Word.

DOES JESUS HIDE HIMSELF FROM US TODAY?

But first, let's ask: Did God hide Himself in the Old Testament?

When Abraham was promised that his descendants would be like the stars in the sky, he believed God. God waited until it was impossible naturally, but Sarai and Abram thought they needed to help God! They went their own way. The result? Ishmael! God then hid Himself for 13 years.

Deuteronomy 31:17-18 I will become angry with them and forsake them I will hide My face from them. God hides His face as result of sin.

In **Joshua 7**, Achan sinned by taking what belonged to God and brought the nation under His anger. Many were defeated by few. God was silent.

Jonah called by God fled in the opposite direction. He lost the personal touch until he was brought back on course and given a second chance.

Psalm 27:9 Do not hide Your face from me, do not turn Your servant away in anger. You are my helper. Not to look with favour is to hide.

Psalm 30:6-7 And in my prosperity I said, "I shall never be moved." 7 Lord, by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled. Self-sufficiency results in pride. When God hides His face, man feels alone.

Isaiah 8:17 I will wait for the Lord who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob, I will put my trust in Him. Only God can restore. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that He might exalt you in due time. To exalt is to draw you closer to Him.

Isaiah 59:2 Your iniquities have separated you from your God your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear. God hiding His face is due to sin which is going your own way or living life on your terms, leaving God out of your life. If you don't know the reason, you need to find out why.

THE NEW COVENANT

Jesus promised **I will never leave you nor forsake you.**

So does Jesus hide Himself in our lives today? **John 12:36** "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

John 7:6-8 My time is not yet here. For you any time will do. 8 I am not going up to this festival because My time has not yet fully come. Jesus hid Himself. He waited for His time.

John 9 Jesus told the blind man to wash off the mud in the pool of Siloam. Then Jesus hid Himself. He waited for that man to speak and defend His Name before He revealed Himself as the Messiah.

John 11 Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill. Because He loved him and his sisters Martha and Mary, He waited two more days. (He hid Himself from the scene of sorrow). He turned up when it seemed too late. Mission impossible. It was a master stroke. Jesus hides Himself. He has His own reasons and it is different for each person.

Luke 24 After the resurrection Jesus joined two people on the road to Emmaus. He kept them from recognising Him. Why did He do that? To gain their attention and for them to be willing to hear what He had to say. Jesus wanted them to trust the Scriptures. He would withdraw His visible presence, but the Scriptures would remain. They had to be taught to believe the Scriptures and obey them. If they did not do that, He would hide Himself but the moment they were willing to believe and obey, He would no longer be hidden. He asked them what they were discussing. They stood still with their faces downcast. He explained what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. while hiding His identity. Jesus remained hidden while they prepared the meal. He blessed the meal and broke the bread and they realised it is the risen Jesus. Praise the Lord. No longer visible but no longer hidden! Their hearts were on fire as Jesus talked. They could not keep it to themselves but told the other disciples.

John 21 Jesus hid Himself from all except His disciples after His resurrection. Jesus hid Himself at the Sea of Galilee. His presence transformed a night of futility. None dared ask Him, “Who are You?” They knew it was the Lord, not in appearance but by His activity.

Acts 9 Jesus hid Himself from Saul of Tarsus and allowed him to try to destroy the church. Why? If He could save the worst of sinners, He can save anyone. Jesus revealed Himself as the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth to Saul and called him to be His apostle to make Him known.



READ

Galatians 1:13-17 Call to Apostleship

1 Timothy 1:12-16 Glory to God for His Grace

Revelation 3 A church was prosperous. They felt they lacked nothing. They were not aware that they had left Him out of their calculations. They were miserable, poor, blind and naked. A destitute bunch of people who thought they should be envied.

Jesus stayed hidden but because He loved them, He had to them that they had left Him out of their lives. Jesus told them, “You left Me out of your lives. I am on the outside. I am waiting for your invitation. I want to share life with you. Every day. In all your decisions. In every aspect of your life. You need Me. If you do not invite Me in, I will stay hidden.”

Does Jesus hide Himself from His children today? Jesus loves them but does not love what they are doing. What is the evidence thereof?

1. **Jesus hide Himself because we insist on going our own way.** Initially we submitted ourselves to the only Saviour. Our simple child-like faith was replaced by a complicated system of rules. We have lost our freedom and the joy of the Lord. We returned to a life where we were in control and Jesus was only consulted in times of need.

Note what is also hidden: **Matthew 11:25 Jesus said “I praise You Father that You have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.”** Only if we remain childlike in our willingness to learn and listen will we be taught and understand the Scriptures. Otherwise God will hide the truth and insights into it.

They had to be taught that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. God begins a work in us, He continues to work until it is completed. When we take over and enslave ourselves by our own ideas and rules of what a Christian should do, Jesus hides Himself until we realise that He is no longer the focus of our lives. We have lost “for me to live is Christ”. Look unto Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith. Do not lose sight of Him or He will hide Himself.

Paul had to write to the Galatians because they had followed false teaching. They had run well but others had insisted on Old Testament rules rather than Jesus Christ alone. They had lost the freedom that faith in Jesus brings.

How did Jesus hide Himself? He hid Himself in death that He might destroy the power of the law of sin and death. We have the Scriptures. Believe them and obey the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus and you will be set free from the law of sin and death. Though Jesus is hidden you will be given spiritual insight.

John 12:35 You are going to have the light a little while longer. Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you. Those who walk in the dark do not know where they are going. What is Jesus

saying? Leave Him, the Light, out of your life and you will live in darkness. You do not know what He wants you to do. You do not understand His Word or His will. While you are alive, put your trust in Jesus. Act now to become His children of light. Do not lose sight of Jesus. Never leave Him out of your daily life.

2. **Jesus hides Himself until we do what He wants us to do.** He stayed out of our lives until we realised our need of submitting to Him afresh. If He has shown you what He wants you to do and you do not carry it out, He hides Himself.
3. **Jesus hides Himself to reveal Himself. Mark 6:45 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away.** Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida. He dismissed the crowd and went to a mountain side to pray. So, Jesus hid Himself from people yet knew all about them and their circumstances. When they realised who He was and was able to do, it strengthened their faith in Him.
4. **When Jesus hides Himself, He waits to be involved by invitation.** Keep on trusting Him. Continue to worship Him. Keep on doing what He has already told you to do. Keep on sharing your faith in Jesus with others. It is Jesus who draws people to Himself, not you. Trust Him to meet the right people and to give the right words to say.
Psalm 50:23 He that offers thank offerings to Me honours Me and prepares the way for Me to show Him the salvation of God.
5. **Jesus hides Himself until we praise Him. Jeremiah 17** teaches that the man who puts his trust in man is cursed but the man who trusts only in God is blessed and is like a tree that sends out its roots in a time of drought. It is not easy to praise God in advance.
6. **Jesus hides Himself until we trust only in Him.** It is so easy to rely on man.
7. **Jesus hides Himself until we fulfil promises made.** We make promises in life to God and then fail to carry them out.

Jesus hides Himself today in our lives. Times of silence. Times of testing. Jesus has His own reasons. There are lessons to be taught. It is a reminder of how much we need Him.

Find out why He is hiding Himself. Ask Him every day to make His presence felt.

THE FATHER'S PRESENCE

John 14:2-3 Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

Where is the Father's house? Where the Father lives and reigns.

What is Jesus doing there? Preparing a place for you. Jesus never left the Father's presence except when He took on the sins of the world and He cried out, "My God My God why have You forsaken Me?"

Why is it necessary for Jesus to prepare a place for you? A prepared place is a place that makes you feel you are home. A place that is yours, that is yours for eternity. A place where you can relax and never feel threatened.

A place where those who keep you company are old friends, those who you already know. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and all those who are there through God using you or were involved in your coming to faith in the Lord Jesus and following Him. You will never feel lonely and amongst strangers.

You will be with people that are like-minded because you will be with those who have come to know God as Father, through Jesus the Son, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Because it is a place prepared and a place to enjoy, you will never remember the times of distress and suffering while on earth. Your sins and its consequences will be forgotten. Your only thought will be of gratitude to the Lord Jesus who has gone to prepare a place for you and made it possible by taking on Himself your sin. You will be surprised by the company of those who are with you. How God used you to bring them to faith in the only way to the Father.

One day at the time of the final resurrection when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, He will come so that you will have a resurrected body like His. Until then you will be absent from the body and present with the Lord. He does not want you to stay absent from the body. Those who have died will rise with resurrected bodies followed by those who are alive who are looking for His return.

There are many rooms in the Father's house. Sufficient space and preparation to receive all the elect chosen in Christ before the creation of the world.

One house, the Father's house. All in that house will have fellowship with the Triune God. A house that gives God pleasure through what He accomplished. A house filled with many good things and a house surrounded by His new creation where there is no sea or anything that divides those He created.

Why many rooms? Could it be that there are places where people of nations will feel at home in the Father's presence but amongst those that were redeemed from their part of the world? No divisions, just feeling at home amongst those known to us. Yet when we meet others from other parts of the world, all will have this in common: we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

John 14:6-7 I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. 7 Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father also.

Jesus said that He is the only way to the Father. Only He deals with the problem of sin. Only He takes the place of the sinner. Only Jesus' life and death is acceptable to the Father. The Bible states that there is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved.

If you know God as your Father. then you have an Advocate with the Father Jesus.

You will have to give an account of how you lived your life after you were saved by grace through faith. Not to do with salvation but your reward. How willing were you to do the will of the Father and allow the Holy Spirit the freedom to use you as He pleased? Did you quench or grieve the Holy Spirit requiring Him to discipline you that you might be fruit and not be empty handed on the final day of accounting?

Try any other way and you will not go to the Father's house nor know God as your Father. The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son. So, if you do not know Jesus as your personal Saviour and Lord you will meet Him on the final day as your personal judge. You will have to give an account of your life. Every idle word. Every thought, every act. You will have no Mediator, no Saviour, no Advocate, you will be on your own. Your acts like those who said they had done many wonderful things and cast out demons which you considered righteous will be seen as filthy rags because your life will be compared with the life of the Lord Jesus who never sinned. Only what was **in line with the Father's will**, will be acceptable to God.

For you who do not know Him, there is no hope but an expectation of eternal weeping.

Why weeping? You had a lifetime to choose to accept God's only way of Salvation, but you turned it down. Now your sin must be punished, and you must bear all of it. Hence an eternity of weeping.

Only through the Lord Jesus can you know God as your Father. Once you accept that Jesus took your place, was punished for your sin, there is nothing to separate you from God your Father. You can enjoy His company. His love, caring, kindness and every provision He has made to enjoy eternity with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Why is Jesus the only Way to the Father? Because He is the fulfilment of every Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. The Triune God prepared the details of the One who would come to earth to accomplish God's purpose. God was amazed or appalled that there was not a single person that could intercede for man, so **His own arm** worked Salvation for Him. Thereafter the Anointed One, the Messiah would be known as "The Arm of the Lord" or "the Servant of the Lord." The Messiah had to be born of a virgin, He had to be born in Bethlehem. The name or character of the Messiah would be Emmanuel or God with us. He would be a male. Very ordinary in appearance, not taller or more handsome, like King Saul. He would endure much opposition. He would not try to attract attention but would quietly teach and heal. He would be like a lamb going to the slaughter without protest. He would be identified with others that were known criminals and be put to death and buried by a rich man. However, He would not stay in the grave but rise before His body decayed. He would be satisfied that His suffering was not in vain but would result in many coming to faith in the only God. The stone that the builders rejected would become the chief cornerstone. His very rejection by man would result in the Salvation of those who trust in Him.

Just a few of the 48 major prophecies that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus proved that Jesus is who the Father said He was. **Matthew 3:17** "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Those who put their trust in Him would never be put to shame.

Why is Jesus The Truth? If He is the way, what will keep those on the way from going astray? They will need signposts. Jesus is saying that He is those signposts. We are to keep our eyes upon Him. The Father hides things from the wise and learned but reveals them to little children. Provided they stay humble and dependent on Jesus, then the signposts which are Jesus Himself

and His teaching will cause them never to go astray.

Man, and his religion, will try to organise life by rules and regulations and try to water down the teaching of Jesus, but the signposts, the truth, Jesus Himself will keep them on the way. Books, experiences, are those of other people. Each one on the way is in a relationship with Jesus in a **One-on-One**, which cannot be copied or imitated. He or she must discover precisely what Jesus wants them to do with their lives while they are on the way to the Father's house. This is found through personal reading and meditating on the scriptures.

Why is Jesus the Life? One cannot go along the way unless you are alive. Unless Jesus is your life, you are dead in your sins. **Philippians 1:21 For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.**

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ; I live yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

One needs to be alive on earth. Even when one dies physically Jesus has promised they would never die if they trusted Him. Jesus would make sure they got to the Father's house. But on earth the only way acceptable to the Father is the life that Jesus lived, and He promised that if people believed His word then the Father and He would make their home in us. We are urged to put to death the old nature and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus said in **John 15:5 "Without Me you cannot do anything."** He is the vine and we who belong to Him are the branches. We need Him as our head to direct our actions. Today if you hear His voice, harden not your heart. We think that busyness and activity satisfies God. No! Obedience and doing the will of the Father is all important. To obey is better than sacrifice. If Jesus is our life, we must live in daily obedience to Him.

What is the Father like? Just like Jesus. Jesus said, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father." So, what does Jesus look like? His character. His words, Teaching, Actions. Dealing with opposition. Use of time. Dealing with problems. Dealing with people. What is important to Him?

Jesus was prepared to spend time with ordinary people. He spent 30 years with an ordinary family, known as the carpenter's son, He chose ordinary people: fishermen, tax collectors and spent three years teaching them.

Jesus worked quietly unobtrusively not seeking attention. Often, he would tell people not to spread what He had done. Other times He told them to make it known where He was not present.

Jesus would single out people for special treatment, He chose people for Salvation.

Jesus showed that He was just like the Father who chose people to use them in His service.

Jesus reveals the Father. He Himself said “I and the Father are One.” Everything He did, the Father did.

Jesus taught using parables so that although they were easy to remember and understand, they required prayerful examination to grasp all He was teaching. The casual listener quickly forgot them.

Jesus revealed the anger of the Father. Those who do not believe in the Son of God, the anger of God abides on them. Jesus showed anger when the FATHER’S House was turned into a marketplace, a den of thieves.

Jesus allowed sinful men to flog Him and kill Him just as the Father allows people to do that to the followers of Jesus.

God had previously taught in **Isaiah 55:8-9 My ways are not your ways neither are My thoughts your thoughts.** Jesus taught truths that were just the embryos of what was to follow. Later Jesus would pass on to the Holy Spirit spiritual truths that we would understand with the help of the Holy Spirit.

BLESSINGS ON OUR JOURNEY

The Triune God is still using us in various ways as we worked with Him in Lebanon, so we continue to work with Him in retirement. One does not remember the ordinary everyday details but there are events that stand out in our lives. To unfold what He did and continues to do, we need His help. To establish a skeletal structure, I recorded when God broke through in the lives of people that came across our path. Salvation is all God's doing. He alone gives liberty to witness, He alone causes us to meet people He wants to save. We are His fellow workers totally dependent on Him.

God uses dreams in difficult areas amongst people prepared by their society to oppose Salvation through Jesus. I was taught by the Lord through a dream as to how He would use me in the Middle East. It would be through people crossing my path. I would not need to look for them.

God has used me in this way. Not through meetings nor through planning on my part, but by apparently casual contacts.

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While I was at university, I felt called to join some men preaching on the steps of the city hall on a Sunday afternoon. It involved preaching to a passing audience and speaking personally to those who stopped to listen. I spoke to an African who had been taught the Bible at school but never responded. The following week he returned to tell me he had put his trust in Jesus. He told me that “No one can serve two masters.”

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Peter sold carpets in a nearby shop. I met him as he was reading an open Bible. I spoke to him about Jesus and gave him “More than a Carpenter” by Josh McDowell. He returned it with no interest. Later I gave it to him again and told him to read it. As I was talking to his son and asking him questions, Peter kept giving me the answers. He could not keep quiet because he had prayed the sinner's prayer and God had saved him. I bought a Persian rug from Peter who only made \$5 profit but then sold a carpet for \$1700. Noreen liked the rug and asked for another. Peter obliged saying he was only making \$5. A few days later he told me he had sold another carpet for \$3000. Was Peter being taught that one cannot out-give God?

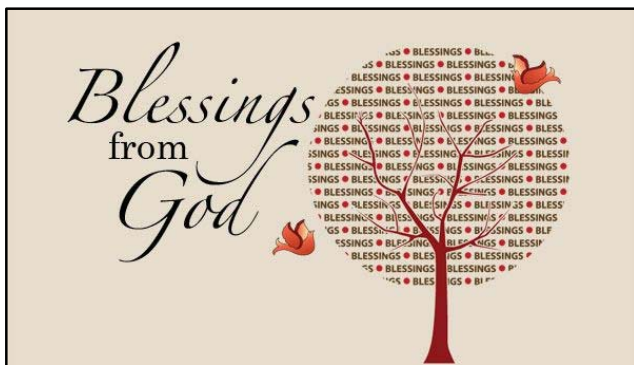
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When our daughter was about 2 years old, she went to play across the road with her friend. The mother there wanted to argue with me about Jesus as she belonged to a sect. I refused to respond. Instead I wrote a prayer on a scrap piece of paper and told her that if she wanted to put her faith in Jesus, she should pray that prayer. Two weeks later I was informed that she had found the One who she had been searching for all her life and was taking her children to the local evangelical Sunday school.

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I was sitting in a workshop of a mechanic waiting for my car to be repaired, when a young man came and sat with me. He was in the army but had broken his leg. I asked him where he would be if it caused his death. It resulted in him trusting in Jesus.

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One day I said to the Lord, “How do I know that it is You telling me what to do?” A few days later, I was sitting in my mother’s lounge when I was told to get up and take a walk down the road. I did so, complaining to the Lord all down the road as the road was deserted. Just before it ended in

a cul-de-sac near a river, a runner came running past me and stopped to massage his legs.

I asked him, “Are you winning?” “Yes!” he replied.

“Are you winning the race of life?” “I think so.”

“If you died tonight and God asked you why He should let you into heaven, what would you say?” “I do not know.”

“Can I help you?” “Yes please.”

I explained the way of Salvation to him and led him in prayer trusting in Jesus for Salvation. Then I asked him what he would say to God.

“Today, no, this afternoon I put my trust in Jesus and I am saved.” I never used those words, but God had done His work. I later gave him a New Testament and booklets but never saw him again. Later when I asked the Lord how I could know it was Him leading me, He asked me, “Who told you to walk down the road?” No more questions!

In the period of 1980 to 1984 we had many moves, in and out of areas of conflict. There were some good memories. We were limited in what we could give our children for Christmas. A family returning to England left behind many Barbie dolls and clothes and toys which made one Christmas very special for our children.

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Paul, our son, told me that he needed R500 to go on a cricket tour. We did not have the money. So, I said to him "Let us pray about it." He looked at me in disbelief and never expected an answer. The money had to be paid on the Monday. Nothing happened. Paul said I could pay it off monthly. I turned that down. I had spoken at a church for three weeks on the parables and on the Sunday was given a gift of R500. Paul said to me, "You did not do it. God did it."

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We returned to the Middle East for mission conferences. Noreen went as the South African delegate and I visited Lebanon where a young man told me I had taught him the Bible and Jungle Doctor stories which resulted in him joining Campus Crusade working in schools and universities.

Another told me he had come to faith at a camp after I had spoken. Much later a student told me I had given him booklets on Salvation. He had put his faith in Jesus and was the only one of his family to do so. He was teaching in Dallas, Texas. It was encouraging for me to learn that all the years of service bore some fruit.

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I frequented a local auction house and bought our furniture there and many vehicles over the years. Once I obtained a BMW with very low odometer reading. It was a mistake because although the price was low, people thought a missionary should not have a BMW!!

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A friend from our church that had a garage wanted to get us a car that was more suitable for our family than a two door Datsun. He called me to come to his garage. When I arrived he asked me what I could afford. I said "R7,500". At that moment a customer brought in his Mazda 626SLX and asked him to sell it. He serviced the car before selling it to me.

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I met a shopkeeper and gave him a DVD of the Life of Jesus produced by Campus Crusade in Arabic and other languages. He responded and was given other literature. In another incident, a travel agent was spoken to and she put her trust in Jesus. We worshipped at a church where many people from Ghana attended. They asked me to teach them the Bible. I was often asked to preach in their meetings on a Sunday and mid-week meetings. Once while sitting in a service I was asked to give the message and souls were saved!

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We thought we had lost contact with our children when we were called to return to the mission field, but God had other ideas. Jeanette came to Lebanon intending to go on to London to earn money as a teacher before she got married. I said she could stay with us for nothing and save all she earned in Lebanon as a teacher. Being a citizen of the country, she did not need a work permit. The principal saw her in action as a teacher and said he would offer a post if she came to the school. She stayed eight months.

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My daughter wanted to visit a fellow teacher. I offered to accompany her, and she agreed. During the visit I spoke to the teacher's brother, Khalil, who had tried various beliefs. I spoke to him about Jesus and led him in prayer. He had been a boxer in England and was in constant pain. Lying on his bed he said to Jesus, "Jesus, I love You." There was a click at the base of his spine and further clicks followed. He got off the bed and saw that instead of being bowed down, he was standing up straight. Another time he again said, "Jesus, I love You." There was a click at the base of his skull and the pain in his head disappeared and then he called his sister to see his eyeballs emerging whereas he could hardly see before. Eventually he returned to his wife and daughter in Canada. Before he left, he was baptised by immersion at our church.

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I showed a lady the way to Jesus and she prayed the sinner's prayer. Later when she phoned relatives in the Gulf States and told them what happened, they asked her to say the prayer over the phone. She told me "It is magic!" but I said, "No, it is Jesus only".

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Where I taught in a school in Lebanon, the principal was a godly man and the students feared him, so when they filed into assembly, not a word was spoken. Yet at home when he sat down to have a meal, in would come some of his granddaughters who would stand around him and sit on his lap and tell him their stories and were all smiles. He too would be relaxed and listen to them. They never met or experienced the strict principal; they only knew him as Grandpa!

Then I understood that if people do not put their trust in Jesus, they will meet God as their judge, and they would stand alone with no one to speak on their behalf. However, if they came through Jesus, they would know God as their Father with no thought of fear because Jesus by His death has taken our sin and punishment.

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I put in an offer for a station wagon, but a fellow teacher went behind my back and offered more. The seller accepted his offer and later apologised for his action which resulted in many complications because the buyer insisted on ongoing repairs. Jeanette encouraged me that God had something better for me. Indeed, he had. A smaller newer car for less money which we acquired and used and sold when we left for the same price that we paid.

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When we settled back in our home in 2002, I became a member of the local golf driving range. I was once a fairly good golfer. I also joined Parow Golf Club in Cape Town, South Africa, and started with a handicap of eleven. My swing returned and I won a number of competitions bringing home prizes of meat for us and others or useful items for the house. However, my reason for joining both places was to reach the lost. So, I would pray that the Lord would lead me to the right people and give me the right words to say.

At the golf range, I helped a golfer with his hitting, and this gave him great pleasure. Afterwards I sat down on a bench to have a rest. A man called Keith who had observed me helping that man said that I had really taught him well. We got chatting and I spoke to him about Jesus. He told me that 30 years ago, when he was 18 years old, his father had told him that one day Jesus would be standing outside the door of his life wanting to come

in. I said to him. "Why not today?" He agreed and I led him in prayer. Then I told him to forget about me and tell others what Jesus had done for him. This he did when he phoned all in his family and apologised for opposing in his youth those who loved Jesus.

Noreen went visiting a couple who said that an older man had visited them who was not well but was rejoicing spiritually because his nephew of 48 had come to faith in Jesus. They asked how it happened and he said that a man who had served God overseas in Lebanon had shown his nephew the way to Jesus. He did not know the man's name. They knew me and told Noreen. A year later I was at the driving range when he approached me. His face was shining almost sparkling. He asked me my name and told me I had led him to faith in Jesus and he was worshipping in a vibrant evangelical church.

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I spoke to neighbours and gave them tracts on Salvation. One lady across the road who was nursing a neighbour returned the tract without any response. Later she informed us that she had been diagnosed with cancer. This time I gave her a tract in Afrikaans her home language. Noreen went to visit her. She told me that Ann had come to faith in Christ. Ann had not said a word, but it could be seen in her face. Later she told us that she was sorry that the Lord had to use cancer to bring her to Him. She died three months later. The man she had cared for was one of the oldest residents of our suburb of Plumstead. I visited him and showed him the way to faith in Jesus and he followed me in prayer. He also died shortly afterwards.

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A neighbour was given booklets on Salvation. He returned them to me and said, "My wife has got religion and you are a missionary, but I have my own way. I had a dream that because I had helped my son buy a flat, I would go to heaven." He later had a heart attack and landed in a private hospital. On his death bed, another neighbour told him that he was either going to hell or heaven. He chose to go to heaven by trusting in Jesus only.

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I was always on the lookout for attractive practical tracts on Salvation. I used the Four Spiritual Laws of Campus Crusade and a banknote of the

South African Reverse Bank with Salvation printed on the other side. This was given to a lady working at the local vet. She was interested so I gave her the tract on the Four Spiritual Laws. A few weeks later I asked her for whom did Jesus die, and she responded for her. As a result of reading the tract given, she had put her trust in Jesus.

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I was always looking out for suitable tracts so one day wrote my own to fit into my wallet and had over 500 printed. A fellow believer who is involved with us paid for the printing. Now I buy tracts which I pass on. I asked the Lord for some indication of response. A young lady working on the shelves of a supermarket was given one of these tracts. She later came rushing up to me with great enthusiasm and declared, "I do not need boyfriends, I have found Jesus!"

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At the golf course I met various people. I saw a man over the age of 80 practising golf shots. He said that he was going to have an operation and wanted to know if he could still play golf. I asked him if he died on the operating table where he would go. He did not know and wanted to know so I told him how to put his faith in Jesus. Six months later, he said he had joined an Alpha course in his church and was rejoicing.

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There was a young man helping the club professional in his shop. He had no idea of Salvation and was willing for me to show him the way. Later he testified that the Bible made sense and that Jesus had changed his life.

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In 2007, I withdrew my golf club membership but would still visit the club when Noreen visited her sister who was dying of cancer. I was sitting on a bench near the putting area watching a stranger. I went over to him and he told me that he was a medical doctor from Namibia and was in Cape Town for an operation. I asked him "if the cancer is terminal where will you go?" He had no idea. I obtained two tracts on Salvation which we went through together. He showed afterwards that God had done a work in his life.



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At the golf driving range, I met Chris who was chipping. He was from England and was a good golfer. He told me that he was an alcoholic but had not touched alcohol for 8 years. I was impressed but told him that it was not enough; he needed to be forgiven. I then gave him a beautifully produced tract on Salvation. The next day he phoned me and said he had read it, but could he come and see me. We sat in our lounge and went through the booklet. He put his trust in Jesus and was born again. I gave him a New Testament. He phoned me and asked, "Did you know that Jesus washed the disciples' feet?" I replied, "yes indeed!" He said "Wow." Then said he was going to play golf that Sunday at Hermanus. I asked him if he had ever thought of going to church. He replied, "That is a good idea."

Instead of playing golf, he went to a nearby thriving church and later told me he enjoyed it so much he went in the evening as well and kept saying "Praise the Lord." Sometime later, he was baptised in our church baptism bath. He worships in another part of the country but always once a year pays a visit. I give him study Bibles to help him on his pilgrimage.

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A young man was practising his putting at the driving range. I gave him booklets on Salvation and asked him, "What is the purpose of your life?" Years later, he stopped me as he was driving down our road and asked if I went to the range and gave out tracts. I affirmed both. He told me that that question went through his mind month after month until he bought "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. He knew that he needed to make a commitment, which he did. He also visited me a number of times to tell of his walk with the Lord. His wife and parents were not that interested until his father died suddenly. I was invited to the service and spoke to his brother and asked him about where he was going at the end. I think that disturbed him because I received a letter rebuking me for talking about death at the funeral! However, the entire family is now going to that thriving church.

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Every year I have prayed about going to the driving range. Sometimes God clearly impels me to go. After speaking to various golfers, I saw a man hitting balls on his own. His name was Philip. Eventually I asked him about his faith. He said he was an Anglican. That he was baptised as a baby and later confirmed. I said neither made him a Christian and he agreed to go

through the Four Spiritual Laws and later prayed putting his trust in Jesus. Then he burst into tears and said, “I never thought this would ever happen to me.” God caused him to be born of the Spirit. I wept with him as we embraced. It was the only time we met.

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One day God told me to leave the garden and go to the golf range. There I met Eric who felt he should come all the way from the sea suburbs to the range. He told me, “I never speak to my wife or my pastor about my past because I am ashamed of it.” I replied that God was not interested in his past but was more interested in what he would do with the Son of God. I gave him a tract on Salvation after speaking to him about his relationship with Jesus.

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For years I concentrated on those who came to improve their golf. Then God made me aware of those employed by the facility. I spoke to them about Jesus and gave booklets on Salvation. One was Joseph. About six months later he told me I had given him what he called, “a book Bible.” He read it and put his trust in Jesus. Then he was given a Bible which he reads every day and goes to a church that preaches Jesus. I was later able to give him a Xhosa Bible.

Sometime later, I felt I should speak to them all and when they came to faith in Jesus, I gave them Xhosa Bibles given to me by others. I was also able to buy second-hand student application Bibles which I passed on to those who love the Lord Jesus. At the range when they see me, they wave to me.

Others have been helped not only with their golf through telling them something simple that brought pleasure when the shots went well and straight, but also encouraged those who were not where they should be in their relationship with Jesus.

Some tell me that I do not know what an impact I had made on their lives, but I am not aware of anything out of the ordinary.

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Africa has come to South Africa. Many have left their society to seek work and income to send to their families back home. Others have brought their families here. I met Sylvester from an African country and working as a car

guard. I gave him a tract on Salvation and after he put his faith in Jesus, gave him a Bible. We often chatted over the years. Then I met one who wanted a French Bible. I bought one at a charity shop and gave it to him.

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Philemon was from Malawi. I made contact with him as he worked in the garden of a surgery. I gave him tracts on Salvation followed by a Bible and a study Bible. He said I was the only one who had spoken to him about personal faith in Jesus.

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Bili was also from Malawi. I asked him about his faith. He said he was a Moslem but now a Christian. I gave him a booklet called “Journey to Life” by Norman Warren. Two days later I went with him through it and he prayed the sinner’s prayer. I was led two days later to give him a large new study Bible. I asked him why Jesus died. He replied, “For me.” Where is Jesus now? “Inside me.” How do you know? “I feel it.” When did this happen? “When we read that booklet together.” When I gave him the special Bible, he said, “This is the first time in my life anyone has ever given me anything.” He later returned to Malawi on a short visit and rejoiced with his brother and wife as they worshipped in church together.

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Eric is from the Congo and speaks and reads French. I was able to get him a French New Testament and later gave him a Thompson’s Chain Reference Bible. He would like to study at a Bible college.

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Of course, many have been spoken to and tracts have been given. People like Sharon from Taiwan studying at UCT. We sat together in a hospital while I waited for Noreen to receive her cancer treatment. I shared God’s plan of Salvation with her and gave her the “Your Most Important Relationship” tract. She left for her appointment but later returned to thank me for speaking to her. Unusual. Another lady of about 40, Anthea, listened as I spoke to her about Jesus and gave the same tract. She asked, “Why has God taken so long?”

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Gardening on the pavement at the front of my house, people meet me, and I have spoken and given tracts. A strange thing has happened that when I set out to reach the lost, nothing happens. Yet when I live and do legitimate business, people cross my path and God has used me to bring blessing in their lives.

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I passed tracts on to many and many reacted very positively. By speaking to people wherever I go, I discover if they belong to Jesus or not. Once I was in a queue at the Magistrate's Office. A man said that he was in a rush and needed to reach the front of the queue. The man in front told him that he would swap places with him. I commended that man for his action and asked if he loved Jesus. He did. The result was a great time of fellowship. Others that I have given tracts or spoken to thank me years later. Some call me pastor but I tell them I am only a messenger boy, bearing good news.

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Sometimes God gives me liberty to go to the golf range. On the way I ask to be led to the right person. Once there was only one other golfer there. His name was Andrew and he wanted to be a professional golfer. He had been in the USA at a university and was back in SA. I spoke to him about Jesus and he agreed to go through the Four Spiritual Laws. Afterwards he took photos of every page. He really liked the page that showed two circles. One where Jesus was outside and he on the throne inside. The next circle Jesus was on the throne inside and he was listening and obeying Him. I fear for so many young pro-golfers who have great ability but never make it to the top and land up with a career coaching others. Far better to find out from God what He has planned for them.

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When I was a member at a golf course, I had many opportunities. I remember playing with Wynand who said to me in Afrikaans, "Ek begin om die vleis te proe!" (I am beginning to taste the meat!) With five holes to go, I told him that golf is a game played one shot at a time and one hole at a time. For all his efforts, I never saw him score the next five holes. In fact, I had to sink a shot off the green on the last hole for us to taste the meat. However, it transformed Wynand's golf. He came to me months later to say he played one shot at a time.

Another time a golfer gave up in the rain. We felt the same way. He was ahead of us and my ball landed close to him. Many swear words poured out of his mouth. Later he asked me what I did for a living. I said I was a missionary. He was shocked and asked me why I did not wear a minister's collar as he would never have used those words had he known that.

Golfers seem to lose their inhibitions and their language is full of foul words. When I asked them if he used that language at home he was horrified saying, "Of course not."

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Count Your Blessings

I have gone through many different cars. Most of them were obtained at a nearby auction house. The reason for getting cars there is because they are usually from a deceased estate and not because they are giving trouble. I obtained a Nissan Primera

with low mileage and full of optional extras. The problem with this car was trying to get spares because only a few were in the country. I prayed about the car and felt the Lord telling me that I would not need to advertise it, but someone would ask to buy it and pay my price. That is what happened.

I went to an auction of cars and obtained a Mazda Etude for our children to use on deputation. Later I was told to offer it to a fellow believer. They are still using it. I was told that the sale of it would cover the cost of renovating the kitchen at our children's house. That is what happened. I no longer went to the auctions because it was an area of temptation.

However, one day I was told to go there on a Wednesday. I did not want to as I had no need. On arrival I discovered the reason. A Toyota Corolla with low mileage and a new engine was to be auctioned on the next Saturday. I was able to arrange my finances and the car is still being used.

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Paul paid for our 50th wedding anniversary. It was held at an hotel. Forty guests were invited. I spoke on the miracles of the timing of God in my life:

- I was called by God to serve Him in Lebanon in 1960.
- I went to the Bible Institute in 1961/2 where I met Noreen.
- God revealed to both of us His will for our lives at the oldest mission station in Africa, the Moravian mission at Genadendal.
- In 1962 my father obtained three promotions in one year and offered to send me to university.

- Noreen joined me in Johannesburg in 1963 and served as a school nursing sister while obtaining a diploma in Public Health.
- In 1966 we got married on a shoestring.
- We applied to join the mission in Lebanon and were accepted.
- In 1968, we left for Lebanon and had to learn Arabic.
- We discovered we could not have children.
- Three times God stopped us from adopting until He gave us Jeanette, an Armenian, and Paul, a Lebanese.
- We were required to obtain personalised support which God alone made possible in 1980.
- On returning to Lebanon, He directed me to change our savings to US\$.
- In 1984 we were bombed out of our flat and escaped harm by the miracle of God's timing.
- We returned to SA but were told to leave our savings in Cyprus.
- In 1984 the SA currency, the Rand, lost half of its value to the \$ and when God directed me to have it sent from Cypress to SA, it was to pay for the house we are living in.
- The house became available the very week I came down to Cape Town. It was a manse of a Baptist church.
- We served 12 years in South Africa.
- The last 7 years we lived without receiving any support from the mission until we were called to return to Lebanon.
- Later both Jeanette and Paul joined us. There Paul met Betsy.
- God called David and Jeanette to serve Him.

The miracles have always been in the timing. We owe everything to God.

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While we were learning the language of Arabic and the culture of the people in that area, the events, lives, scenes, circumstances in the Bible were better understood. I would preach on parables and passages of the Bible but ask the Lord in the light of **Matthew 11:25** to teach me as I was still only a child spiritually and needed His insight to uncover fresh truths. Many times, God blessed His people through His Word.

We have grown older and still have each other. I believe that God still has work for me to do. I am convinced that my part is not to do anything but to wait in faith for Him to unfold His purposes. In the meantime, to use every opportunity to bring non-believers to a saving faith.

INDEX

911 - The Twin Towers	223	2 Corinthians 3:18	287
A Challenge to Live a New Life	289	2 Corinthians 5:10	279
A New Covenant	299	2 Corinthians 5:10-11	270
Abraham and Jacob	49	2 Corinthians 5:15	251
Acts 1: 7-8	96	2 Corinthians 5:17	64, 252
Acts 2:23	291	2 Corinthians 5:21	35, 222
Acts 4:10-12	136	2 Corinthians 5:21	214
Acts 8	200	2 Corinthians 6:14	91
Acts 9	305	2 Corinthians 8: 9	43, 173
Acts 10:42	95	2 Corinthians 12: 7-10	288
Acts 17:31	95, 270	Daniel 2:44-45	190
Adopted Like Jacob	55	Daniel 7: 7-28	190
Amos 1	146	Daniel 7:13-14	227
Amos 2	146	Daniel 8:19	95
Amos 3	147	Daniel 9:24-27	190
Amos 4	148	Daniel 12: 1-4	190
Amos 4:6-13	149	Daniel 12: 2	133, 223, 271, 276
Amos 5	150	Daniel 12: 3	128
Amos 6	150	Deuteronomy 7: 7-8	148
Amos 7	151	Deuteronomy 8:15-16	287
Amos 8	152	Deuteronomy 12: 5-6	300
Anticipatory Forgiveness .	187	Deuteronomy 22: 9-12	90
Be Ready	210	Deuteronomy 31:17-18	304
Blessings on our Journey .	313	Deuteronomy 32:35	270
2 Chronicles 32:31	287	Discarded	135
Common Truths	240	Does Jesus Hide Himself from us Today?	304
Consider Jesus	227	Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8	95
1 Corinthians 1:27	135	Ecclesiastes 3:14	92
1 Corinthians 2: 1-5	135	Ecclesiastes 3:17	95
1 Corinthians 2: 9	299	Ecclesiastes 12:14	270
1 Corinthians 3: 6-8	270	Ecclesiastes 12:14	278
1 Corinthians 3: 9	271	Ephesians 2: 8-9	240, 252
1 Corinthians 3:10	271	Ephesians 2:10	95
1 Corinthians 3:15	272	Exodus 12: 2-12	300
1 Corinthians 4: 3-4	272	Exodus 16:23	300
1 Corinthians 4: 5	270, 272, 274, 279	Exodus 30:24-25	133
1 Corinthians 5: 7	285	Exodus 33:19	56
1 Corinthians 9: 9-11	90	Ezekiel 1	142
1 Corinthians 9:27	274	Ezekiel 2	142
1 Corinthians 10:11	285	Ezekiel 3	142
1 Corinthians 11:26	300	Ezekiel 4	143
1 Corinthians 15: 3	261	Ezekiel 5	144
1 Corinthians 15:19	274	Ezekiel 8	144
1 Corinthians 15:52	270	Ezekiel 18	145

Ezekiel 18: 2	144	Hebrews 3: 7-8.....	225
Ezekiel 33	143, 145	Hebrews 3:14.....	285
Ezekiel 33: 7	145	Hebrews 8:11-12.....	299
Ezekiel 36:26-31	112	Hebrews 9:27.....	270, 279
Ezekiel 44:17-18	91	Hebrews 10:16.....	299
Forgiven? Forgive!	166	Hebrews 10:35-39.....	297
Galatians 1:13-17	305	Hebrews 10:37-38.....	95
Galatians 2:15	176	Hebrews 10:38.....	160
Galatians 2:20 .137, 234, 277, 281, 297, 311		Hebrews 11: 9.....	51
Galatians 4: 4	95	Hebrews 12: 1-11.....	286
Galatians 5: 7	281, 286	Hebrews 12: 6.....	271
Galatians 5:13	235	Hebrews 12:10.....	271
Genesis 18:19	49	Impact of the Resurrection of Jesus	275
Genesis 25:13	123	Invitation to Share Life ..	212
Genesis 25:23	51	Isaiah 1:11.....	228
Genesis 27:41-42	69	Isaiah 7:14.....	227
Genesis 28: 3	69	Isaiah 8:14.....	291
Genesis 28:13	52, 67	Isaiah 8:17.....	304
Genesis 28:13-15	69	Isaiah 9: 6.....	186, 228
Genesis 31: 1	71	Isaiah 26:12....	92, 134, 222, 232, 253, 273
Genesis 31: 3	71, 87	Isaiah 28:16.....	291
Genesis 31: 4	72	Isaiah 30:20-21.....	45
Genesis 31:24	72	Isaiah 42: 1.....	228
Genesis 31:42	86	Isaiah 42: 1-3.....	138
Genesis 32: 1-2	72	Isaiah 42: 2-4.....	228
Genesis 32: 9	87	Isaiah 42: 8.....	273
Genesis 32:11-12	87	Isaiah 44: 6.....	239
Genesis 35:27	51	Isaiah 49: 1-4.....	139
Genesis 37:11	79	Isaiah 49: 6.....	299
Genesis 45:27-28	82	Isaiah 50.....	140
Genesis 50:15-21	83	Isaiah 51: 5.....	138
Gifts Alive! Use Them!	177	Isaiah 53.....	138, 140, 228
God Uses Nobodies	146	Isaiah 53:11.....	286
Grace: Sharing a Meal and Life	175	Isaiah 53: 3.....	301
Grace: Workers in the Vineyard	168	Isaiah 53: 4-5.....	245
Guidance by God	45	Isaiah 53: 6.....	256
Habakkuk 1	159	Isaiah 53: 7-8.....	202
Habakkuk 2	160	Isaiah 53:12.....	229
Habakkuk 2: 2-3	95	Isaiah 55: 8-9.....	312
Habakkuk 2: 3-4	45	Isaiah 59: 2.....	304
Habakkuk 2: 4	160, 295	Isaiah 59:15-16.....	138
Habakkuk 3	161	Isaiah 59:16....	109, 214, 229
Habakkuk 3:13	161	Isaiah 61: 1-3.....	183, 185
Hebrews 3	283	Isaiah 61:10.....	35
Hebrews 3: 6	285	Isaiah 62: 8.....	138
		Isaiah 63:10.....	302

Isaiah 64: 4 .. 19, 48, 79, 83	John 11: 4	234
Isaiah 66:15	John 11:25	234
James 1: 2-3	John 11:25-26	276
James 4:11	John 11:41	223
James 5: 9	John 12:26	227
Jeremiah 5:31	John 12:35	306
Jeremiah 15:19	John 12:36	304
Jeremiah 17	John 12:49	223
Jeremiah 31:31	John 12:49-50	284
Jeremiah 32:38	John 13: 7	19
Jesus and the Money Issue .	John 13:13-15	235
Jesus' Way of Praying	John 14: 2	106
John 1: 4-5	John 14: 2-3	246, 308
John 1: 9	John 14: 3	227
John 1:11-12	John 14: 6 . 203, 235, 237, 242	
John 1:11-13	John 14: 6- 7	309
John 3:16	John 14: 6-10	241
John 3:36	John 14:23	301
John 4: 1-42	John 15: 1	237
John 4:21	John 15: 2	112
John 4:25-26	John 15: 5	311
John 4:34	John 16: 7	302
John 5:28-29	John 16:12	219
John 5:21-22	John 18:33-37	249
John 5:22	John 18:36-37	244
John 5:25	John 19: 6	244
John 5:44	John 19: 9	249
John 6:35	John 19:10-11	249
John 6:43-47	John 19:26-27	250
John 7: 6	John 19:28	250
John 7: 6-8	John 19:30	250
John 7:34	1 John 5:11-12	137
John 7:37	1 John 5:12	237
John 7:37-39	John 21	305
John 8:23	Jonah 1	153
John 8:51	Jonah 2	155
John 8:58	Jonah 2:8	16
John 9	Jonah 3	156
John 9: 5	Jonah 4	156
John 10: 7	Joshua 7	304
John 10: 9	Justification by Faith Alone	
John 10:10	219
John 10:11	Key to a Harvest - Listen	
John 10:14-17	Well	180
John 10:18	1 Kings 13	94
John 10:27-28	Lessons from the Servant ..	138
John 10:35-36	Leviticus 1: 3-5	301
John 11	Leviticus 8:12	133

Living by the Invisible in the Visible	295	Mark 15:34.....	250
Luke 4:16-22.....	183	Mark 15:37.....	250
Luke 6:35.....	272	Matthew 3:17.....	310
Luke 7:36-50.....	187	Matthew 5:44.....	272
Luke 9:30-31.....	285	Matthew 6:20.....	272
Luke 9:57-62.....	190	Matthew 6:21.....	209
Luke 10:20.....	54	Matthew 7: 1.....	273
Luke 10:25-37.....	193	Matthew 7:13-14.....	93
Luke 11: 1-13.....	203	Matthew 7:22-23.....	212
Luke 12:13-21.....	208	Matthew 7:23.....	291
Luke 12:35-48.....	210	Matthew 10:26.....	270, 279
Luke 14: 1-24.....	212	Matthew 10:42.....	272
Luke 14: 5.....	205	Matthew 11:25... 203, 306, 325	
Luke 14:33.....	137	Matthew 11:25-27. 17, 141, 241	
Luke 15.....	28	Matthew 11:25-28.....	27
Luke 15: 4.....	205	Matthew 11:27.....	235, 279
Luke 16.....	41	Matthew 11:28.....	242
Luke 16: 9.....	247	Matthew 11:28-29.....	187
Luke 17: 5-10.....	217	Matthew 12:36.....	274
Luke 17: 7.....	205	Matthew 12:36-37.....	270, 279
Luke 17:20.....	129	Matthew 15:12-14.....	240
Luke 18: 9-14.....	219	Matthew 16:24.....	251
Luke 18:14.....	212	Matthew 18:21-35.....	166
Luke 18:31-33.....	275	Matthew 19:16-30.....	168
Luke 18:38.....	221	Matthew 20: 1-16.....	168
Luke 22:10-13.....	275	Matthew 22: 1-16.....	175
Luke 22:37.....	229	Matthew 24:13.....	285
Luke 23: 3.....	249	Matthew 25:14-30.....	177
Luke 23: 9.....	249	Matthew 26:64.....	286
Luke 23:28-30.....	250	Matthew 27:11.....	249
Luke 23:32.....	244	Matthew 27:12.....	249
Luke 23:34.....	244, 250	Matthew 27:13-14.....	249
Luke 23:39-43.....	244	Matthew 27:46.....	250
Luke 23:43.....	250	Matthew 27:56.....	250
Luke 23:46.....	250	Micah 7:8.....	45
Luke 24.....	305	Micah 7:8-9.....	115, 120
Luke 24:49.....	95	Most Reliable Witness	244
Malachi 1.....	162	Numbers 14: 1-22.....	284
Malachi 2.....	163	Only You	93
Malachi 3.....	90, 164	Paul's Parables	280
Malachi 3: 6.....	20, 145	1 Peter 1:19.....	285
Malachi 3:10.....	94	1 Peter 2: 1-3.....	289
Mark 4: 1-29.....	180	1 Peter 2: 4-10.....	290
Mark 6:45.....	307	1 Peter 2:13-17.....	292
Mark 15: 2.....	249	1 Peter 2:18-25.....	293
Mark 15: 3.....	249	1 Peter 5: 5-6.....	288
Mark 15: 4-5.....	249	1 Peter 5: 6.....	125, 212
		2 Peter 3:10.....	272

Philippians 1: 6	286	Psalm 120	123
Philippians 1:21	237, 311	Psalm 121	123
Philippians 4:13	25	Psalm 122	124
Practical Lessons in Hebrews		Psalm 123	125
3	283	Psalm 124	126
Proverbs 3: 5-6	86	Psalm 125	126
Proverbs 3: 5-7	45	Psalm 126	127
Proverbs 3: 6	203	Psalm 127	128
Proverbs 3:12	287	Psalm 128	129
Proverbs 14:12	256	Psalm 129	130
Proverbs 14:14	114	Psalm 130	130
Proverbs 15:22	208	Psalm 131	132
Proverbs 28:13	108	Psalm 132	133
Psalm 14: 1	209	Psalm 133	133
Psalm 18: 25-26	178	Psalm 134	134
Psalm 19: 14	90	Psalm 139: 16	96
Psalm 22: 6-7	228	Resurrection Sunday	251
Psalm 22: 16	228	Revelation 1: 8	238
Psalm 23	24, 102, 233	Revelation 1:17-18	238
Psalm 27: 9	304	Revelation 3	305
Psalm 30: 5	251	Revelation 3:20	22, 110, 138, 216, 231, 302
Psalm 30: 6-7	304	Revelation 8: 5	123
Psalm 32	107	Revelation 20:12	270
Psalm 32: 8	124	Romans 1:16-17	296
Psalm 32: 8-9	45	Romans 1:17	122, 160
Psalm 37: 23-24	124	Romans 2:16	270
Psalm 37: 25	173	Romans 4: 1	49
Psalm 42	110	Romans 8:14	285
Psalm 42: 2-5	288	Romans 9: 7-21	51
Psalm 46: 7	85	Romans 9:11	162
Psalm 46: 10	85, 253	Romans 9:14-16	162
Psalm 50: 23	111, 307	Romans 10: 9	251, 278
Psalm 73	112	Romans 11:35	209, 218
Psalm 73: 23	233	Romans 12: 3	92
Psalm 73: 23-24	45	Romans 12:19	273
Psalm 73: 24	235	Romans 13:11	96
Psalm 73: 25	109	Romans 13:14	237
Psalm 95: 7-8	283	Romans 14: 5	301
Psalm 98: 1	138	Romans 14:10	270
Psalm 110: 1	186, 260	Running the Race	286
Psalm 110: 4	260	Ruth	97
Psalm 111: 10	81, 154	Ruth 1	97
Psalm 115: 3	271	Ruth 2	99
Psalm 118: 22 ..	136, 251, 291	Ruth 3	100
Psalm 118: 23	252	Ruth 4	101
Psalm 118: 24	254	1 Samuel 12:20-21	236
Psalm 119: 11	112	1 Samuel 26:21	256
Psalm 119:105	45		

Saul and Jesus in Arabia ..	258	The Shepherd's Psalm.....	102
Talking to Yourself	110	The Spirit of the Lord....	183
Tall Saul and Short Saul ..	255	The Three Psalm.....	107
The Appointed Time	95	The Words of Jesus on the Day He Died	249
The Bad Samaritan	195	1 Thessalonians 5:1-2.....	96
The Bonus Test	208	1 Thessalonians 5:9.....	96
The Ethiopian Eunuch	200	2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 270, 279	
The Father Ran	28	2 Thessalonians 1:7-8.....	272
The Father's Presence	308	Three Questions about the Life of Jacob	86
The First to Sleep on a Foam Blubber Mattress.....	153	1 Timothy 1:12-16.....	305
The Good Samaritan	193	1 Timothy 1:15.....	253
The Judgment Seat of Christ	270	2 Timothy 1:11.....	96
The Just Shall Live By His Faithfulness.....	159	2 Timothy 2:03-8.....	280
The Life of Faith	119	2 Timothy 4:7-8.....	269
The Priest Who Became a Prophet.....	142	Two Kinds of Seed.....	90
The Rich Man Who Thought He Was Poor.....	112	Unknown But Effective.....	162
		You Decide.....	190
		You Owe us Nothing.....	217