



Psalm 57

For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A miktam. When he had fled from Saul into the cave.

1 Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me,
for in you I take refuge.

I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings
until the disaster has passed.

2 I cry out to God Most High,
to God, who vindicates me.

3 He sends from heaven and saves me,
rebuking those who hotly pursue me—
God sends forth his love and his faithfulness.

4 I am in the midst of lions;
I am forced to dwell among ravenous beasts—
men whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.

5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth.

6 They spread a net for my feet—
I was bowed down in distress.

They dug a pit in my path—
but they have fallen into it themselves.

7 My heart, O God, is steadfast,
my heart is steadfast;

I will sing and make music.

8 Awake, my soul!

Awake, harp and lyre!

I will awaken the dawn.

9 I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;
I will sing of you among the peoples.

10 For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth.



Psalm 58

For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A miktam

1 Do you rulers indeed speak justly?
Do you judge people with equity?
2 No, in your heart you devise injustice,
and your hands mete out violence on the earth.
3 Even from birth the wicked go astray;
from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies.
4 Their venom is like the venom of a snake,
like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears,
5 that will not heed the tune of the charmer,
however skillful the enchanter may be.
6 Break the teeth in their mouths, O God;
LORD, tear out the fangs of those lions!
7 Let them vanish like water that flows away;
when they draw the bow, let their arrows fall short.
8 May they be like a slug that melts away as it moves along,
like a stillborn child that never sees the sun.
9 Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns—
whether they be green or dry—the wicked will be swept away.
10 The righteous will be glad when they are avenged,
when they dip their feet in the blood of the wicked.
11 Then people will say,
"Surely the righteous still are rewarded;
surely there is a God who judges the earth."



The Upside Down Kingdom Part 1

God blesses those who are poor and realise their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs

Matt 5:3 (NLT)

Jesus spent a lot of time proclaiming the Kingdom of God (or as Matthew puts it the Kingdom of Heaven). From what Jesus said it is clear that the Kingdom of God will not operate on the same principles as those in this world. Wealth, power and authority will be unimportant in God's Kingdom. That is Good News for those who struggle in this world whether that is through illness, lack of confidence, war, injustice or poverty.

Jesus begins the Beatitudes by giving a great promise to the 'poor in spirit' that they will inherit the Kingdom (or it will belong to them).

But who are the 'poor in spirit' that Jesus is addressing?

In Luke's version of the Beatitudes (*Luke 6:20*), the reference is just to the poor and they are contrasted with the rich (in *Luke 6:24*) who only have happiness now.

The Amplified Bible suggests that they are those devoid of spiritual arrogance or who regard themselves as insignificant.

Perhaps Jesus has in mind the image of those whose spirits are contrite and humble who live with the high and lofty God in *Isaiah 57:15*.

It is I think clear that Jesus is addressing those who put their trust in God (in contrast to the wealthy who put their trust in worldly possessions or the arrogant who trust in their own independence) or as the NLT puts it "realise their need for Him".

God's Kingdom belongs to those who accept the message of John the Baptist and Jesus to repent of their sins and return to God; in particular the 'poor in spirit' who renounce the worldly sin of pride.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to recognise that our ultimate security lies in you. Help us to see that putting trust in our own strength or wealth is foolish. We don't know what tomorrow may bring. Help us to draw close to you each day.

Question: What first made you realise the need for God in your life?



The Upside Down Kingdom Part 2

God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted Matt 5:4 (NLT)

Jesus proclaims that God will comfort those who mourn.

When Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah (61:1-2) in Luke 4:18-19 he announced that the Day of the Lord's Favour has come; that he had been anointed to bring Good News to the poor, to proclaim that the blind will see and that captives (and the oppressed) will be set free.

Isaiah was writing at the time of the exile in Babylon and from chapter 40 onwards brought a message of comfort, hope and forgiveness to the exiles. After saying in 61:1 that the Lord's anointed servant would bring comfort to those who mourn, Isaiah goes on to say in 61:3 that they will be given a crown of beauty instead of ashes, a joyous blessing and festive praise instead of despair.

Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of the Day of the Lord's Favour: a reversal of fortunes and the restoration of those in exile.

Paul says in 2 Cor 1:3 that God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He goes on to say that God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.

The world may tell us to always seek for happiness. But the Bible tells us that there is a time to cry as well as a time to laugh; a time to grieve and a time to dance. We all experience times of sorrow and deep grief. At such times, God can draw close to us and comfort us as we mourn.

Being comforted by God does not mean that he takes all our troubles go away. But we receive strength, encouragement and hope to deal with our troubles. God is with us in our coronavirus world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father and Lord of all comfort, help us to draw close to you in our times of need. Give us the strength we need to get through each day. Restore our spirit when it is broken and provide us with hope for the future.

Question

Have you known the closeness of God during a time of grief?



The Upside Down Kingdom Part 3

God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth Matt 5:5 (NLT)

God opposes the proud but favours the humble (Prov 3:34, James 4:4 and 1 Pet 5:5).

When Jesus wanted to demonstrate how those in positions of power and authority should behave, he chose to wash his disciples' feet. In *Matt 23:12* Jesus says: The greatest among you must be a servant. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

The Jews expected Israel to inherit the earth. They were expecting God to act in power to restore their earthly Kingdom. But Jesus turned their expectation upside down. God was no longer going to act with power and might in the way that he had done in the past. God was now acting through Jesus going to the cross – the way of humility and weakness.

Humility is essentially having a true view of oneself which expresses itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others.

The humble will inherit the earth. One would have expected the opposite. In general, the tough and powerful succeed in this life, whilst weaklings 'go to the wall'. But in God's Kingdom, such earthly experiences are turned upside down.

Psalm 37 says: Don't worry about evil people who prosper. Wait patiently for God to act. The lowly will possess the land and live in peace and prosperity.

The reference to 'inheriting the earth' may help us understand that the blessings promised are not all in some far off future after death. Jesus promised all the blessings to his followers in the here and now. We begin to 'inherit the earth' in this life since if we are Christ's then all things are already ours (*1 Cor 3:22-23*).

Prayer: Living Lord Jesus, help us to have a true view of ourselves. Remind us that we are not better than others. Give us patience to deal sensitively with other people. When we are tempted by pride to look to our own strength, show us how weak we really are.

Question

We may admit before God that we are miserable sinners but how do we respond when other people point out our failings?



The Upside Down Kingdom Part 4

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice (or righteousness), for they will be satisfied Matt 5:6 (NLT)

Wellesley Bailey grew up during the potato famine in Ireland in the 1840s and 1850s. He dreamed of finding a new, more promising life and set out to find his fortune in the goldfields of Australia in 1866. Three years later he returned home to Dublin with his ambitions unfulfilled. One of his brothers was serving in the police force in India and invited Wellesley to join him there which he did in 1869.

Whilst in India, Wellesley Bailey witnessed the severe consequences of leprosy. He was shocked by what he saw: some had clawed hands, some were blind and some had disfigured faces. Wellesley wrote: *I almost shuddered, yet I was at the same time fascinated, and I felt that if there was ever a Christ-like work in the world it was to go amongst these poor sufferers and bring them the consolation of the gospel.* Wellesley vowed to make caring for those with leprosy his life's work.

Since then more than fifteen million people have been cured of leprosy.

So would Wellesley Bailey be satisfied?

I doubt it! I like to think that he would be pleased with what the Leprosy Mission he founded has achieved so far. But there is still more to do – we won't be satisfied until we live in a world free of leprosy.

Today around 5 million people are still living with the effects of leprosy and each year 250,000 more people are diagnosed with this ancient disease. And leprosy is still most prevalent in India where the Leprosy Mission started all those years ago!

We desire to do God's will; God's law is written on our hearts. (*Ps 40:8*)

We will not be satisfied until we 'finish what Jesus started'. We will only be satisfied when 'leprosy has become a thing of the past'.

Prayer: Almighty God, we recall the words of the prophet Amos and want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living in this world. Help us not to be satisfied with the status quo but give us the desire and the energy to seek change for the better. Enable us to speak up for those without a voice: the marginalised and those who are discriminated against. Help us to make leprosy a thing of the past.

Question

What wrong things in this world make you angry?

Norman Lazonby – Treasurer, The Leprosy Mission Scotland



The Upside Down Kingdom Part 5

God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy Matt 5:7 (NLT)

In the Lord's Prayer, we ask for God's forgiveness of our sins. But God's forgiveness is said to be conditional on our forgiving others of their sins against us.

A definition of mercy is "compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm".

God certainly has the power to punish us as our sins deserve. And, if we are honest with ourselves, we recognise that and throw ourselves on God's mercy to seek His forgiveness.

But is our attitude to others the same when we are in a position of power over them? How good are we at forgiving someone when they have done or said something that hurts us? Why do we find it so difficult to offer forgiveness to others when we believe they are in the wrong?

When we look at all the broken relationships in our world, we realise that forgiveness or mercy of others is often in short supply. We too easily take offence and hold onto grudges against members of our family or those we previously regarded as friends.

Forgiveness is the first step in restoring relationships. Forgiveness isn't a once and for ever solution. Jesus tells us that we need to forgive someone who sins against us seventy-seven times! (*Matt 18:22*)

But, showing forgiveness isn't easy. The Pharisees and leaders of the religious law at the time of Jesus struggled to show mercy or forgiveness. They did not like it when Jesus showed mercy to sinners. And Jesus criticised them for tithing even the tiniest herbs but ignoring the more important aspects of the law: justice, mercy and faith (*Matt 23:23*).

Forgiveness is the key to our relationship with God. We will be blessed by God's mercy if we are merciful to others.

Prayer: Loving and merciful God, you know our hearts and lives. We confess to you that which causes separation, that which causes pain or distress and that which breaks down. We ask for your help to do better, to reconcile, to heal, to soothe and to build up. So that we may love you and our neighbours, and follow our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Question

Why do we find it so difficult to confess or apologise to others when we know that we are in the wrong?

Norman Lazonby – Treasurer, The Leprosy Mission Scotland



Psalm 59

For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A miktam. When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him.

¹ Deliver me from my enemies, O God;
be my fortress against those who are attacking me.

² Deliver me from evildoers
and save me from those who are after my blood.

³ See how they lie in wait for me!
Fierce men conspire against me
for no offense or sin of mine, LORD.

⁴ I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me.
Arise to help me; look on my plight!

⁵ You, LORD God Almighty,
you who are the God of Israel,
rouse yourself to punish all the nations;
show no mercy to wicked traitors.

⁶ They return at evening,
snarling like dogs,
and prowl about the city.

⁷ See what they spew from their mouths—
the words from their lips are sharp as swords,
and they think, "Who can hear us?"

⁸ But you laugh at them, LORD;
you scoff at all those nations.

⁹ You are my strength, I watch for you;
you, God, are my fortress,

¹⁰ my God on whom I can rely.

God will go before me
and will let me gloat over those who slander me.

¹¹ But do not kill them, Lord our shield,
or my people will forget.

In your might uproot them
and bring them down.

¹² For the sins of their mouths,
for the words of their lips,
let them be caught in their pride.

For the curses and lies they utter,

¹³ consume them in your wrath,
consume them till they are no more.

Then it will be known to the ends of the earth
that God rules over Jacob.

¹⁴ They return at evening,
snarling like dogs,
and prowl about the city.

¹⁵ They wander about for food
and howl if not satisfied.

¹⁶ But I will sing of your strength,
in the morning I will sing of your love;
for you are my fortress,
my refuge in times of trouble.

¹⁷ You are my strength, I sing praise to you;
you, God, are my fortress,
my God on whom I can rely.



Psalm 60

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Lily of the Covenant." A miktam of David. For teaching. When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

- ¹ You have rejected us, God, and burst upon us;
you have been angry—now restore us!
- ² You have shaken the land and torn it open;
mend its fractures, for it is quaking.
- ³ You have shown your people desperate times;
you have given us wine that makes us stagger.
- ⁴ But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner
to be unfurled against the bow.
- ⁵ Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered.
- ⁶ God has spoken from his sanctuary:
"In triumph I will parcel out Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Sukkoth.
- ⁷ Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;
Ephraim is my helmet,
Judah is my scepter.
- ⁸ Moab is my washbasin,
on Edom I toss my sandal;
over Philistia I shout in triumph."
- ⁹ Who will bring me to the fortified city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
- ¹⁰ Is it not you, God, you who have now rejected us
and no longer go out with our armies?
- ¹¹ Give us aid against the enemy,
for human help is worthless.
- ¹² With God we will gain the victory,
and he will trample down our enemies.



The Upside Down Kingdom Part 6

God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God Matt 5:8 (NLT)

I find this the most challenging of the beatitudes. I cannot with honesty say that my heart is pure. I enjoy reading books and watching films which include sex and violence. I have done and said things which I know to be wrong. For three-quarters of my life to date, I did not even acknowledge God.

So, is there no hope for me to see God?

Yes there is! When I turn to Scripture I find that the greatest people in the Bible were also sinners whose hearts were not always pure. Isaiah, when coming into God's presence, described himself as a man with filthy lips. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and put her husband on the front line of a battle so that he would be killed. The apostle Paul described himself as the worst of sinners.

Of all the beatitudes, it is this one which reminds me that I cannot earn my way into God's Kingdom. I need to throw myself on God's mercy and grace. Only God can make us pure and blameless in his sight!

The seraphim touched Isaiah's lips with a burning coal and said his guilt was removed and his sins forgiven (*Isa 6:7*). In *Psalms 51*, David appeals to God because of His great compassion: *wash me clean from my guilt and purify me from my sins; do not banish me from your presence but create in me a clean heart and renew a loyal spirit within me.*

The apostle Paul reminds us that *everyone has sinned and we all fall short of God's glorious standard* (Rom 3:23) but Jesus can free us from this life that is dominated by sin and death (Rom 7:24-25). Paul also tells us that before taking communion we first need to examine ourselves to ensure that we are not doing so unworthily (*1 Cor 11:27-32*).

To come into God's presence, we need to acknowledge our sins and failings and turn to God to receive His forgiveness and cleansing. Only then can we have the purity of heart required to see our Holy God.

Prayer: *Loving and merciful God, you know our hearts and lives. Is it possible for us to have pure hearts? Can you do that for us? We confess that our hearts have been stained and we ask you to transform our lives and cleanse us. Set us free from the guilt of our sins and help us to be more like Jesus we pray.*

Question

What areas of your life do you need to ask God to help you with?



The Upside Down Kingdom Part 7

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called children of God Matt 5:9 (NLT)

When considering natural selection in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, philosopher Herbert Spencer popularised the term 'survival of the fittest'. The 'fittest' is often equated with the most aggressive and violent. But that is a misunderstanding; co-operation is an incredibly powerful survival strategy. The 'fittest' can be the most loving and selfless!

This world is often driven by jealousy, greed and power. People desire what they do not have. They are not satisfied with what they have got but always want more – a better car, a bigger house, a dream holiday, more salary, a lottery win

In his song, *Knowing You (All I once held dear)*, Graham Hendrick wrote that there is "no greater thing than knowing Jesus". He contrasts the great joy of knowing Jesus with the worthlessness of all that this world "reveres and wars to own".

Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition (which are earthly and unspiritual), we will find disorder and evil of every kind. In contrast, God's wisdom is peace-loving, gentle at all times and willing to yield to others. (*James 3:13-18*).

As followers of Jesus, we should do all that we can to live in peace with everyone (*Rom 12:18*).

Those who work for peace will be called children of God.

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God (*Rom 8:14*). We are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus (*John 1:12; Gal 3:26*).

The book of 1 John is like an extended commentary on what it means to be children of God. It means that God loves us very much (*3:1, 4:9-16*), that we should love God and one another (*2:5-7, 3:11-24, 4:7, 4:19-21*) and not the things of this world (*2:15-16*). In fellowship with the Holy Spirit, Jesus and the Father, we enjoy the eternal life Jesus promised (*2:25, 5:20*).

Prayer: Lord Jesus, our Prince of Peace, please grant us peace of mind and calm our troubled hearts. Help us to avoid needless anxiety and worry. Free us from our covetous desires and enable us to be satisfied with, and find joy in, all the good things that we have received from God. Where there is hate, bring your unending love. Where there is conflict, help us to be your ambassadors of reconciliation. We pray for your Kingdom to come; your will to be done; and for your peace that surpasses all understanding.

Question

Do you have the assurance that you are a child of God?

Norman Lazonby – Treasurer, The Leprosy Mission Scotland



The Upside Down Kingdom Part 8

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way. Matt 5:10-12 (NLT)

John Stott, in his commentary on the *Sermon on the Mount*, says the beatitudes are Christ's own specification of what every Christian ought to be. They set forth the balanced and variegated character of Christian people. These are not eight separate and distinct groups of disciples, some of whom are meek, while others are merciful and yet others are called upon to endure persecution.

In the first seven beatitudes, those who God blesses could largely be seen as people of any faith or those without faith. And it is true that the Bible tells us that God is concerned for all peoples and especially the weak, the poor and the oppressed.

But when it comes to the final beatitude, Jesus refers specifically to his followers who will receive their reward in the life to come. As Jesus' followers, we may be mocked and persecuted in this life but if we persevere to the end a great reward awaits us.

Like Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane we may pray for God to take away our suffering but only if it is His will for us. We may need to be willing to make a stand for Jesus in the face of opposition to demonstrate our faith and to be a witness to the Good News.

As followers of Jesus, it is not enough to just believe the right things but we also need to do the right things. The book of James tells us that faith without deeds is dead or useless.

The Kingdom of God is an upside down Kingdom but it is not just about a reversal of values in the life to come, God's Kingdom is also at least partly present in the here and now.

As followers of Jesus we cannot just withdraw into a private faith – our faith in Jesus needs to be lived out in the public sphere. Jesus told his followers they needed to be in this world but not of it.

As a Christ-centred organisation, Jesus is at the heart of all we do in The Leprosy Mission. We work to defeat leprosy and transform lives. We want to ***make leprosy a thing of the past to finish what Jesus started.***

Prayer: Almighty God, when we feel weak and discouraged, give us we pray the strength to continue to follow your Son Jesus. When we are afraid to speak out, help us not to deny Jesus but give us the words and the courage we need to bring your Good News to a broken world. Help us to persevere during times of difficulty. Please equip TLM with all it needs to defeat leprosy one person at a time.

Question: When was the last time that you spoke to a non-Christian about the Christ-centred work of TLM?



Our faithful God

Peter Waddup, country leader of TLM England and Wales wrote:

„Hi Marta,

In our devotions at TLMEW this morning we spent time sharing words that describe our faithful God.

Our challenge was to find at least one word starting with each letter of the alphabet.

We thought of many more.

I thought it was worth sharing this in the bridge as the list is worth reading through whilst praying to remind us of the many ways he has impacted our lives.”

Awesome, Amazing, Adorable, Almighty, Alpha, Abba,
 Beautiful, Bold, Big, Benevolent,
 Caring, Compassionate, Courageous, Counsellor, Creator,
 Divine, Daddy, Dependable,
 Ever lasting, Extraordinary, El Shaddai, Energy,
 Faithful, Father, Forgiving, Fountain of life,
 God, Generous, Goodness, Giving, Gracious, Great, Gentle,
 Healer, Holy, Humble, Hope, Happy, Incomparable,
 I AM, Indescribable, Intelligent, Immutable, Immortal, Inclusive,
 Jesus, Jehovah Jireh, Joyful, Judge, Jealous,
 Kind, King, Keeper, Knowing,
 Lion of Judah, Loving, Light, Lord, Life, Long suffering, Life giving, Lamb,
 Mighty, Majesty, Magnificent, Maker, Messiah, Merciful, Mediator, Marvellous,
 Nice, Never ending, Near,
 Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, Omega, Overcomer,
 Prince of peace, Perfect, Parent, Praise worthy, Prophet, Papa, Present, Passionate, Protector,
 Quiet,
 Royal, Rapha, Redeemer, Radiant, Righteous, Ruler Rock, Real, Rewarder,
 Shalom, Saviour, Still, Spirit, Sanctifier, Satisfier, Shield, Sin bearer, Slow to anger and
 abounding in love, The Good Shepherd, Sovereign, Sanctuary,
 True, Teacher, Triumphant, Tender, Tenacious,
 Universal, Unfathomable, Unstoppable, Unshakeable,
 Victorious, Valiant, Visionary,
 Wondrous, Waymaker, Wise, Watchful, Wonderful Counsellor, Wild,
 X-citing, X-traordinary, Xenial, X Ray vision,
 Yahweh,
 Zealous.



'up in the air'

"Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart..." Psalm 27:14

I have a scripture-postcard on my wall that I find both beautiful and thought-provoking. It quotes Psalm 27:14 and shows a child up in the air, having clearly been tossed up by the hands of a mum or dad. The hands are visible at the bottom of the picture ready to catch the child as she falls. (I can never understand why children love this kind of game, but then, maybe that's because I'm of grandparent age!)

Suspended in mid-air between the trajectory-force pushing her up, and the gravity force pulling her down, what strikes me is the expression on the child's face, which is hard to describe. It is a mixture of **fun, fear and faith**. There is **fun**... the thrill of 'danger-within-safety' that children love, whether it's on a playground swing or climbing a tree or -as here- being thrown up by a strong dad! Then there is **fear**... helpless in mid-air, outside the comfort zone of 'terra firma'. "What if I fall? What if the adult doesn't catch me... or can't?" And then there is **faith**... that the adult I'm looking down on is strong enough to catch me and loves me enough to do so. (Can you imagine the disaster if the adult tosses the child up and then walks away? Not only would the child be physically hurt, but the trust in that adult would be lost for ever!)

There are strong parallels with God, who loves us, who promises to be with us always, to walk the difficult paths with us, to strengthen and encourage, to provide and protect. This is *Father God*, who inspires the Psalmist to tell us to "wait on (for) the LORD", to "be of good courage," because "He shall strengthen your heart." A parent, like our Father God, shares the joy in seeing courage and strength growing in the child, building bonds of trust and love through fun, fear and faith, -equipping the child for the demands of life's journey yet to come.

I used to go and collect a little boy from school. The homeward journey often involved a visit to a children's playground, which contained a climbing frame in the form of an archway. Aged 5 or 6, the little fellow would tentatively climb up and over, and I would stand underneath. I wanted him to build up agility, courage and trust, as well as guard his safety, so I would say, "Try putting your foot here", or "hold on there"; and I would also keep repeating, "I will never let you fall". It was a joy for me also, to feel trusted and share the sense of achievement at the end. (He's 16 now, so I wouldn't try it today!)

I feel sure that God also finds parental joy in giving us opportunities for fun, fear and faith, pushing us gently, calling us forward, enjoying our trust in his presence and power. There are many demands for courage and strength in our world today, especially with the additional challenges of leprosy. Sometimes we feel like the child in my picture, suspended in space; but even if we don't see or feel the evidence of God's presence, the assurance of *Deuteronomy 33:27*, remains: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath you are the everlasting arms."

May God hold you firmly and lovingly, whatever today brings.

David Beazley began involvement with The Leprosy Mission in 1992 when he came as Minister to a Church near the International Office in Brentford. He acted as an informal 'chaplain' to the Office, and served on the International General Council for some years. At the same time he became a member of TLM England and Wales Board, serving as Chairman for six years and on various committees. He chaired the Spiritual Ministry MAWG, and is also able to serve TLMI by leading retreat days and other such things as opportunity allows. He now pastors a Church in South-West England part time, and continues as a volunteer speaker for TLM.



Psalm 61

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. Of David.

- ¹ Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.
- ² From the ends of the earth I call to you,
I call as my heart grows faint;
lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
- ³ For you have been my refuge,
a strong tower against the foe.
- ⁴ I long to dwell in your tent forever
and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.
- ⁵ For you, God, have heard my vows;
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.
- ⁶ Increase the days of the king's life,
his years for many generations.
- ⁷ May he be enthroned in God's presence forever;
appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him.
- ⁸ Then I will ever sing in praise of your name
and fulfill my vows day after day.



Psalm 62

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

- ¹ Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.
- ² Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.
- ³ How long will you assault me?
Would all of you throw me down—
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?
- ⁴ Surely they intend to topple me
from my lofty place;
they take delight in lies.
With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.
- ⁵ Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.
- ⁶ Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
- ⁷ My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.
- ⁸ Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.
- ⁹ Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.
If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.
- ¹⁰ Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen goods;
though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.
- ¹¹ One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:
“Power belongs to you, God,
and with you, Lord, is unfailing love”;
- ¹² and, “You reward everyone
according to what they have done.”



Friendship with Jesus – 1

Promotion to a new Intimacy

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another. John 15: 12-17

We see Jesus promoting his disciples to another level of relationship from servants to friends. In verse 13 Jesus says greater love has no one than this that someone laid down his life for his friends.

What could have happened if Jesus had not let down his life in our place. We would remain under the wrath (John 3:36) and we would perish (John 3: 16). He calls them friends and then went on to say what was what he expected from them in that friendship. And today, that same invitation of friendship is offered to us. Therefore, our existence as His friend is owing to the love Christ has for us.

Like any friendship to grow it is imperative that we know that person. It is a process, it takes time, effort, discipline, sacrifice, letting go and giving up. From a platonic relationship the progression is to intimate friendship. God is inviting you to enjoy this intimate fellowship with Him.

What then is intimacy? It is an experience of really knowing or being known by another person. it is a 2-way process and its relational. You may be sitting next to a person and feel distant but close to a person 10,000 miles away. Psalm 73: 28 says, For me, it is good to be near God. James 4: 8 says, Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Let us seek nearness and intimacy with God. Intimacy is not mere knowledge. Knowledge is acquired and intimacy is cultivated through hours of time spent in conversation and companionship. Are we full of knowledge about Jesus but have failed to be a friend? Jesus said you will seek the truth and the truth will set you free. John 5: 39- 40.

As friends of Jesus we are called to love one another, obey his commands, understand the truth with Jesus has revealed to us through his father, bear much fruit that will last.

Dear Jesus, you are my true and loving friend. Grant me the grace to grow

in intimacy and friendship with you.



Friendship with Jesus – 2

Servant or friend

Today the question we will ask ourselves is how do I see myself? As a friend or a servant of Jesus? What is it that distinguishes friendship from slavery? John 15: 15 says I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. A servant does what he is commanded. He obeys because that is his duty. He does not need to know why. The Master does not need to explain why. But that is not how a friend is treated. Jesus said, you are my friends because I have explained to you the 'why' 'What' of my Father's business. Hence you will obey me and do what I command out of love for me as a friend, not out of duty as a servant,

A friend will ask things of you, is willing to serve. God's friends serve him, John 15:14 and God serves his friends John 14: 14. It is a mutual relationship. Let us then redefine our relationship with Jesus.

What does it mean to be friends with Jesus? It means allowing yourself to be defined by Him. Mathew 16:13 to 23, Being friends with Jesus means hearing him say do not be afraid. When Jesus is your friend you are certain there is someone in your life who understands your fragility, struggles, and hurts, Hebrews 2:18. When Jesus is your friend you know you will never be excluded because of your failures or shortcomings, Romans 8: 28.

Friends of Jesus love one another just as He loved us. Repetitions are a key to learning and Jesus repeats this so that we understand the importance of love. Love is not optional to those follow Him. Christ- like love is self-sacrificing and a commitment. Friends of Jesus obey his commandments out of love of friendship. They understand the truth he has made known from the Father and are chosen to bear fruit that remain as they depend upon him through prayer.

What relationship is the driving force of my life? Am I serving Jesus as a servant or as His friend? Do I know my Master's business?

Lord Jesus, you have exalted me to a friendship that is centred in your love. I want to grow in a deeper relationship with you as a friend. Help me to truthfully examine myself and recommit myself to serving you.

Joydeepa Darlong Dr - Head of Knowledge Management, The Leprosy Mission Trust India. A Family Physician, worked as Consultant and Deputy Superintendent for 15 years at The Leprosy Mission Hospital, Purulia, West Bengal, India.



Friendship with Jesus – 3

My Father's business

If Jesus is my friend, then he has revealed His Father's business to me. It is my duty to understand what the Father business is. From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, the business of God remains the same. King David had just one desire. In Psalms 27: 4 he says one thing I have desired of the Lord where I dwell in the House of the Lord forever. Jeremiah 31: 31- 33 says I will be their God and they shall be my People. God's business is found in the name of Jesus, you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." God's business is found in the Mission of Jesus. On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Mark 2:17.

This narrative from the childhood of Jesus speak clearly to us that Jesus knew his Father's business from a very young age. then he stayed back at the synagogue at the age of 12 his mother was anxious and came frantically back looking for him. he told his mother, "why were you searching for me? Did you not know I must be about my father's business? Jesus desired to be in his father's house doing his father's business.

The Father's business is found in the final prayer of Jesus on earth John 17:11 to 12

The Father's business from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is found in what Jesus is doing currently. I am going to fill rooms for you then I will come back and take you. John 14:2,3. God's business is forever the same. It does not change. It consistently, continually, continuously constantly remains the same.

We are fellow workers meaning we work together. Is it not astonishing that God requires Co-workers? Do we remember inviting our children to help with household chores like cooking, baking, gardening, cleaning the cupboard? Did we do it for greater efficiency. No! When we would have to clean up later, time taken would be longer, but we did it because we love our child and delight in his company. We want him to learn and grow and stretch himself. We know how important it will make him feel to share with us in the work. It is the same in God's business. It gives us dignity and purpose by allowing us to share in His work. Is my friendship with Jesus a pursuit of God's business?

Dear God, thank you for making me a co worker in your business. Allow me to pursue in the knowledge and exercise of seeking you spreading the Word.

Joydeepa Darlong Dr - Head of Knowledge Management, The Leprosy Mission Trust India. A Family Physician, worked as Consultant and Deputy Superintendent for 15 years at The Leprosy Mission Hospital, Purulia, West Bengal, India.



Friendship with Jesus – 4

Friends rub off on you

Jesus had some special friends while he lived on the earth. The family of Lazarus was special, and Jesus often went there for rest and solitude. In John 12, we read that 6 days before Passover they hosted a dinner in His honour. Mary knew that it was a going home party. She had heard Him talk about His death. She had spent many hours at His Feet. And she was able to believe in the impossible. He was going to die. The disciples lived in denial; some did not understand. She did what only a friend could have done. She grieved. Taking the jar of expensive fragrant perfume, she poured it at his feet. That was all she could do at this time knowing full well that it was nothing compared to what Jesus was about to do in a few days' time. Jesus would be stripped of everything as he hung on the cross, but the fragrance of that friendship lingers on, even till today.

Impulsive and childlike, when Peter denied, Jesus prayed and forgave. When Peter fell out of step, Jesus gently reprimanded him. When Jesus suffered Peter followed even though from a distance but surely, he followed and did not stop following.

John stood with his mother at the cross. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took down His body from the cross. Mary Magdalene reached early morning to look for his body, Peter and John ran at full speed to get to the tomb of Jesus protect their friend's body but left in awe of resurrection. His friends responded not out of religious obligations but of committed friendship and love Jesus had rubbed on them.

A few weeks later after the ascension of Jesus in *Acts 4:13 we read, "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they marvelled and **took note that these men had been with Jesus.***

When we spend long hours with someone, their traits, convictions, mannerisms rub off on us. Have you noticed this? Yes, Friends do rub off on us.

Just as the men in the temple noticed a difference in Peter and John and realized that it was because they had been with Jesus, do our friends notice a difference that points to Jesus? Do they realise that what we are is because we have been with Jesus? Let us endeavour to spend time with Jesus for His friendship to rub off on us.

Dear Jesus, thank you for your friendship because of which I am what I am today. Let my life be a testimony that people may know you and glorify you.

Joydeepa Darlong Dr - Head of Knowledge Management, The Leprosy Mission Trust India. A Family Physician, worked as Consultant and Deputy Superintendent for 15 years at The Leprosy Mission Hospital, Purulia, West Bengal, India.



Friendship with Jesus – 5

Cross – The highest symbol of friendship

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends John 15: 13

In John chapter 15 :15 Jesus promotes His disciples to a greater level of intimacy by saying, I no longer call you servants But I have called you friends. He defines love and obedience in friendship. “You are my friends if you do what I command” Vs 14, “this is my command Love one another Vs 17. Obedience, love, and friendship go hand in hand.

The life-giving friendship of Jesus does not merely talk the language of friendship, he lives out his life as a friend. Jesus is not referring to a casual friendship at all anywhere. Not the kind we are acquainted with. A few hours before, he had finished washing the feet of the disciples demonstrating servanthood. Few hours later, He would demonstrate the highest level of friendship by laying His life on the cross. It is at this cross we see the enormity of His commitment. It is friendship in action -not mere words but practical friendship.

When His time comes near, Jesus takes His friends to the garden of Gethsemane. As a Shepherd friend he leads them to the garden to Watch and Pray. When the thief comes, Jesus steps forward to be identified to Judas with a kiss. In John 18:8, he says “I told you that I am he”. He identifies himself. “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” He does not allow the thief to have access to the sheep. The life of Jesus cannot be taken from him. He lays down his life on his own accord. New living translation puts it beautifully in John 10: 18,” No one can take my life for me, I sacrifice it voluntarily”. He willingly chose the ultimate act of friendship by carrying his own cross and giving up his life for us. The Cross became the highest symbol of friendship.

As friends of Jesus, we are called to model a friendship like Him .We may not have to give our life but we are called to love by not counting cost and not holding back We are called to love sacrificially and loving one another as Christ has loved us. Are we friends of Jesus? Yes, we are. Are we loving our friends as He did? That is a thought for us to meditate and ponder.

Father, Thank you for the gift of friendship in Jesus. Help me to love my friends as Jesus loved.

Joydeepa Darlong Dr - Head of Knowledge Management, The Leprosy Mission Trust India. A Family Physician, worked as Consultant and Deputy Superintendent for 15 years at The Leprosy Mission Hospital, Purulia, West Bengal, India.



Psalm 63

A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.

- ¹ You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.
- ² I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.
- ³ Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.
- ⁴ I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.
- ⁵ I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
- ⁶ On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night.
- ⁷ Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings.
- ⁸ I cling to you;
your right hand upholds me.
- ⁹ Those who want to kill me will be destroyed;
they will go down to the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁰ They will be given over to the sword
and become food for jackals.
- ¹¹ But the king will rejoice in God;
all who swear by God will glory in him,
while the mouths of liars will be silenced.



Psalm 64

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

- ¹ Hear me, my God, as I voice my complaint;
protect my life from the threat of the enemy.
- ² Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked,
from the plots of evildoers.
- ³ They sharpen their tongues like swords
and aim cruel words like deadly arrows.
- ⁴ They shoot from ambush at the innocent;
they shoot suddenly, without fear.
- ⁵ They encourage each other in evil plans,
they talk about hiding their snares;
they say, "Who will see it?"
- ⁶ They plot injustice and say,
"We have devised a perfect plan!"
Surely the human mind and heart are cunning.
- ⁷ But God will shoot them with his arrows;
they will suddenly be struck down.
- ⁸ He will turn their own tongues against them
and bring them to ruin;
all who see them will shake their heads in scorn.
- ⁹ All people will fear;
they will proclaim the works of God
and ponder what he has done.
- ¹⁰ The righteous will rejoice in the LORD
and take refuge in him;
all the upright in heart will glory in him!



Take Nothing for the Journey – Part 1

I recently read about a book called *A Philosophy of Walking* by a man called Frederic Gros – no I have not read it yet. In this book he writes about the art of packing a rucksack for a week's walking trip. One question keeps coming up as he packs: "Is *this* item really necessary?"

That's a question many of us ask when we are packing for a journey of any sort – we ask usually because of the weight of the luggage because either we have to carry it or we are restricted by airlines.

But as I read about the book, I thought about our walk through life, our walk with the Lord. I wondered what I carry with me for that walk that I really don't need. What weighs me down and what keeps me from that walk with the Lord?

What about our walk with the Lord? I am writing this during Lent so have been thinking about the events that we remember during those weeks leading up to Easter. Many of those events involve Jesus going on a walk – a walk in the desert, a walk to Jerusalem, a walk to the crucifixion. Sometimes those walks were for Jesus lonely walks, sometimes He had the companionship of the disciples, but always He had the presence of His Father supporting and encouraging Him giving the strength and the courage for what lay ahead.

Only once do we read of Jesus carrying anything as He walked – He carried the cross. It was a heavy weight on Him yet it was the burden He could not, He would not lay down for that was the burden He carried for us – for me and for you. When the burden we carry on our walk through life becomes heavy we are invited to lay down that burden, leave it behind and walk with Jesus – He is ready to carry that burden for us.

As we think of other walks Jesus took, walks alone to spend time alone with God – we read that often these walks were in the very early morning (eg. *Mark 1:35*). I am sure He carried nothing with Him, nothing to distract Him from the time He wanted to spend with His Father. I wonder what we carry when we want to spend time with God. I know it is hard to spend prime time with God – alone without any "baggage". I know how often, when I do retreat to my corner planning just to be quiet before God, thoughts of others, thoughts of things I need to do creep into my mind and come between me and that precious time with God. At other times, especially after a busy few days, I struggle with the blank times – the times I should spend with God and yet that momentum of busy-ness leaves me thinking of the next task rather than just resting with God from my tiring walk.

As I walk along the prom where I live, I have particular places where I remember to pray for specific people or ministries. So many people these days seem to have phones glued either to their ears or to their fingers as they walk along. I was really surprised one day when I met two young people (one of whom I knew) and they stopped what they were doing to speak to me – to discover that even though they were walking side by side, they were actually sending each other messages rather than talking. That can be a bit like us when we are walking with God – are we talking with Him – talking to Him but also being quiet to hear what He has to say to us. Let us spend time with God when we have taken nothing with us for the journey.

"When we walk with the Lord, what a glory He sheds on our Way"

Today let us leave our baggage behind and walk with our Lord, remembering to take time to spend just with our companion – to talk to Him and to listen to Him.



Take Nothing for the Journey – Part 2

Faith Bears Fruit

When we head out on a journey, we plan with care the supplies, clothing, money etc., so that there is no hindrance on the way to accomplish the purpose of the journey. In contrast to this worldly wisdom, Jesus' instruction to his disciples on their first missionary journey was *"Take nothing except a staff-no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt"* (Mark:8-9). Quite a contrast!

Jesus often told his disciples his identity and purpose for coming into this world. He came to save the lost, heal the sick and restore people to their fulness (John 3:17; Luke 5:31-32). They had witnessed Jesus' miracles of power and compassion. "Hitherto they sat at his feet, had heard his doctrine, and seen his miracles; and now he determines to make some use of them; they had received, that they might give, had learned, that they might teach; and therefore now he began to send them forth." Seeing and believing is not enough; compassion towards others has to be demonstrated. The challenge is to transit from theory to practice. The crucial test is "how" to be a disciple of Jesus in action, in the real world.

The ambassador of Christ goes out into the World with faith in the Word of God. Jesus had permitted the disciples to carry only the staff/rod (Mark 6:8). For the Jews of the day, it's significance would not have been lost. The staff in the hands of Moses symbolized divine truth and power, the Lord. The disciples went out accompanied by the same. The Lord had equipped them with what they needed for their ministerial journey. At the same time Jesus specifically denies the disciples to carry any physical means of sustenance, food, clothing, and money. It is to encourage their dependence and trust in God (John 6:35). Life of a gospel preacher is challenging. For any significant impact, the foundation must be strong.

The message of repentance and restoration calls for renouncing all idols, worldly bondages and keeping Jesus first in one's life, at all times, in all circumstances. Attachment to material possessions/comforts distracts us from the purposes of God. Jesus had reoriented the minds of the disciples from themselves/ their possessions to God. Their focus must be on the Word only. Nothing must come between the disciple and the Lord, in sharing the Good News. As God's instrument one has to humble oneself completely. The vessel has to be empty for the grace of God to be poured out. The instrument (the disciple) is only as effective as the Spirit (of Faith) that resides within (the soul). Because of their faith in Him, the disciples obeyed the instructions of Jesus.

The disciples were a small motely group but had revealed the saving grace of the living Lord Jesus to others. The power that Christ gave them over unclean spirits, was not ineffectual, nor did they receive it in vain, but used it, for they cast out many demons; and they anointed many with oil and healed them (Mark 6:13). In the scriptures oil represents the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18). Preaching and healing go together. Sin and Satan have captured the whole person. The disciples had cared for the whole person—body, mind, and soul so that the whole person is brought to experience God's grace. Faith had empowered the disciples' ministry.

The disciples had one objective, share the revelation of repentance and redemption of man's relationship with God through Jesus (Mark 6:12). The design and tendency of gospel preaching should be to bring people to repent of their sins and turn to God, to a new heart and a new way. This purpose can be achieved only

through complete and unconditional faith in the person of Jesus as the anointed saviour, the Son of God.

The instrument (the disciple) is only as effective as the Spirit (of Faith) that resides in one's soul. God's instructions will challenge our wisdom at times; but trusting in Him yields great results. Truly, complete dependency on the Lord makes his ambassadors fulfil His purpose of salvation of Man.

Faith, obedience and dependency are required for grace, compassion and restoration to manifest.

In gratitude, for His glory.

Dr PLN Raju - Former Director (Resource Mobilization) The Leprosy Mission Trust India New Delhi



Owls and grasshoppers

One of the joys of being out under the stars at night is the soft hooting from owls in the trees in the hills above our house. Last night was especially blissful – the wind died away and it seemed that all the owls in the valley had come out for a chat. The downside was that the lack of wind meant that my telescope was soon covered in heavy dew and I had to call it a night.

It's not always moonlight and roses. A while back, an owl swooped on a bush next to me and bore aloft a protesting pigeon, which was about to be served as a late supper or early breakfast to a nest of hungry owlets. Knowing our love of owls, my daughter gave me an owl box – designed to encourage owls to nest in your garden. When it arrived, Elizabeth and I looked at it in disbelief. It was huge! It looked better-suited to a Cape vulture than an owl. Did I really want to tempt something akin to a Pterosaur into my dark garden? The instructions on the box were formidable, including an entreaty to place the box high in a tree, protected from the sun and wind. If there is a wind free zone in my garden, it is keeping itself remarkably well hidden. On top of that, I don't really have trees in my garden – just big shrubs. The owl box landed on the floor of my shed whilst I tried to decide what to do about it. It was so big that it robbed me of a lot of floor space and that, combined with having banged my shins on it once too often, led me to decide that a big shrub, wind and all, would have to do. I set to work and hacked away the branches to create a landing space for the box.

Fortunately, it wasn't very high off the ground and I was able to heave the box into position where it settled with a reassuring thump.

I got down from the ladder and stood back to admire my work. My jaw dropped and I called Elizabeth. We looked in surprise at the owl box. Miraculously, it had shrunk in size. What had looked unnecessarily big now looked no larger than a bulky letterbox in the tree. All a matter of perspective, I suppose, but we were both astonished by the way our view of the box had changed. It now looks too small for owls. It seemed ridiculous that I should have found it a struggle to get it in place, except that I have plenty of bruises on my arms proving just how awkward and heavy it is.

There are numerous examples of misplaced perspective in the Scripture, but perhaps the response of the spies sent out by Moses in Numbers 13 is the one we remember best from Sunday School days: *"We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."* [Numbers 13:33] Moses had to continuously lead his people in the face of what seemed like insurmountable obstacles – escaping the clutches of Pharaoh, passing through the Red Sea, finding food and water in the desert and in this case, the entrenched strength and ruthless hostility of the surrounding nations. Caleb urged the people to possess the land at once, but the other spies were overcome by the seeming impossibility of the situation. Sadly, the voice of the grasshoppers prevailed and they "died by the plague before the LORD", a description which seems all too shockingly real to us at this time in global affairs.

Was Caleb naturally braver than the others, more visionary, more of a go-getter, a stronger leader? Possibly, but the Bible reveals in Numbers 14:24 what set him apart from the other spies: *"But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it."* Another spirit within him.

To be honest, I have many grasshopper moments. Sometimes, whole grasshopper days. Whatever we are called to do will at times seem overwhelming. As the saying goes, 'If your vision doesn't scare you, it's not

really a vision'. If we are to fulfil our God-given visions, we will need His God-given spirit. The Spirit who spoke through Caleb.

May our prayer for each other today be that that Spirit will fill us and guide us, giving us boldness to do the things which are beyond our capabilities. Let us go out and possess the land.

Peter Laubscher - Country Leader, Southern Africa. Peter and Elizabeth Laubscher have worked with the Leprosy Mission since 1981. They are blessed with three children. Peter cruises the waters of False Bay when he's not trying to polish scratches out of telescope mirrors.



A door of hope

"I will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope." Hosea 2:15

Hosea prophesied during a period of 38 years in a very crucial time for his country. He lived in the tragic final days of the northern kingdom of Israel and warned the people of the coming enemy. He saw the future and gave the prophetic history in advance. Samaria, the capital, was soon captured and its people exiled in 722-721b.c., bringing the northern kingdom to an end.

It's interesting to hear this prophet talking about hope in this very difficult situation. He gave his strict warnings, but also a word of encouragement and of hope. When every door seems to close, God is speaking about a door to open, a door of hope.

God gave a strange example when he mentioned the Valley of Achor. The valley was situated outside the town of Jericho and was very much connected with bad feelings. When people heard about the valley of Achor they were terrified and very sad. The valley was a kind of a monument of a national trauma, and you may read about it in the Book of Joshua, chapter 7.

The Valley of Achor was a symbol of defeat, judgement, failures, sin and betrayal. People avoided that place if possible. It was like an open wound in the history of the people. The memory was so painful and humiliating.

Now the prophet, the voice of God, gave this amazing and astonishing proclamation. The Valley of Achor will be transformed to a door of hope, an opening into the future. It will no longer be a hurting memory of the past, but an open door towards new possibilities.

God is the God of transformation and hope, of a second chance and of new beginnings. This is the message of the Gospel that God is able to change our lives, regardless our background and history of sin and failures.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God" 2 Cor 5:17-18

The Leprosy Mission has a goal: "Leprosy defeated, lives transformed". We know for sure that God may transform a person marked by illness, exclusion, discrimination and stigma to a door of hope and transformation for body, soul and spirit. A door of confidence to the future and to rich blessings. A door of healing for the whole person and of new possibilities for tomorrow.

The world needs hope today and we are called to be representatives of hope. The world needs reconciliation and God *"gave us the ministry of reconciliation"* (2 Cor 5:18). The world needs salvation and peace with God more than anything else, and we are called to preach the Gospel.

A door of hope! What a wonderful message for someone imprisoned by illness and exclusion. But also for anyone trapped in hopelessness and despair of the sins and failures of the past.

What a wonderful statement for all of us!

"These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut.... See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut." Rev. 3:7-8

Our hope is not an ideology, an idea or a political program. Not even a religion. Our hope is a person, a living Savior; *“Christ Jesus our hope” 1 Tim 1:1* Jesus Christ is our hope, the door of hope into the future on earth and in heaven.

Jesus is the hope for the world!

Jesus is the hope for people affected by leprosy and for all of us. Regardless our background and past he is able to make the Valley of Achor a door of life and hope!

Allan Ekstedt, country leader TLM Sweden



I'd like to pursue the idea of His part & My part.

His part: 2 Peter 1:3-4 NIVUK "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

I've noticed at Christmas time people can't wait to open their gifts. Younger children will rip open gift after gift because they want to see what's next. Yet often we neglect or ignore God's gifts to us. **His divine power has given us everything we need...** Are you able to fully grasp the magnitude of this gift to us? His gift to us is not from a supermarket or some expensive up-market shop, it's **His divine power** that He has given to us! This is a gift that meets every thing we've ever wanted or needed! ...**given us everything we need...** God has a purpose behind this gift: ... **so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.**

His part: 1. Is for us to be like Him. 2. For us to escape the corruption in the world. Not from the world but the corruption in the world. 3. To enable us to take control of evil desires - that is desires that damage our relationship with God.

My part: *2 Peter 1:5-8 NIVUK "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Our Heavenly Father is appealing to us to take His gift to us and make the necessary changes, through the divine power of this gift, to cause us to be effective and productive in and for the Kingdom of God!

My part: *"make every effort to add to your faith..."*

Friends this is our part - My part that I have to do when I declare that Jesus is my Lord! Visit the steps, work at the steps, bring change to yourself that will cause you to be effective and productive in and for the Kingdom of God! Receive this divine power as a gift, open it up, use it to its full ability - to become more Christlike.

Dan Izzett - Zimbabwe. Retired pastor. I was diagnosed with lepromatous leprosy in 1972. Served on TLMI board for eight years and on the Zimbabwe board for 15 years. I now serve on the ALM board and do advocacy for them.



Psalm 65

For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.

- ¹ Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion;
to you our vows will be fulfilled.
- ² You who answer prayer,
to you all people will come.
- ³ When we were overwhelmed by sins,
you forgave our transgressions.
- ⁴ Blessed are those you choose
and bring near to live in your courts!
We are filled with the good things of your house,
of your holy temple.
- ⁵ You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,
God our Savior,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas,
- ⁶ who formed the mountains by your power,
having armed yourself with strength,
- ⁷ who stilled the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
and the turmoil of the nations.
- ⁸ The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;
where morning dawns, where evening fades,
you call forth songs of joy.
- ⁹ You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.
- ¹⁰ You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
- ¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.
- ¹² The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.
- ¹³ The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.



Psalm 66

For the director of music. A song. A psalm.

- ¹ Shout for joy to God, all the earth!
² Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious.
³ Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!
So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you.
⁴ All the earth bows down to you;
they sing praise to you,
they sing the praises of your name.”
⁵ Come and see what God has done,
his awesome deeds for mankind!
⁶ He turned the sea into dry land,
they passed through the waters on foot—
come, let us rejoice in him.
⁷ He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations—
let not the rebellious rise up against him.
⁸ Praise our God, all peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard;
⁹ he has preserved our lives
and kept our feet from slipping.
¹⁰ For you, God, tested us; you refined us like silver.
¹¹ You brought us into prison
and laid burdens on our backs.
¹² You let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and water,
but you brought us to a place of abundance.
¹³ I will come to your temple with burnt offerings
and fulfill my vows to you—
¹⁴ vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke
when I was in trouble.
¹⁵ I will sacrifice fat animals to you
and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats.
¹⁶ Come and hear, all you who fear God;
let me tell you what he has done for me.
¹⁷ I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue.
¹⁸ If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened;
¹⁹ but God has surely listened
and has heard my prayer.
²⁰ Praise be to God,
who has not rejected my prayer
or withheld his love from me!



The methods and the activities of the Master

Matthew 4: 23-25

Jesus had chosen His mission in Galilee, and we also realize that how well prepared Galilee was to receive the seed. Within the Galilee Jesus choose to launch his campaign in the synagogues. The synagogue was essentially a teaching institution. The synagogues have been defined as “the popular religious universities of their day.” If a man had any religious teaching or religious ideas to disseminate, the synagogue was the most suitable place to start. Further, the synagogue services such that it gave the new teacher his chance to express and explain. Jesus began in the synagogues because it was there he would find the most sincerely religious people of his day, and the way to speak to them was open to him. After the address there came a time for talk, and questions, and discussion. The synagogue was the most ideal place in which to get a new teaching across to the people.

But not only did Jesus preach and teach: he also healed the sick. Many people from near and far places came to listen to him and also to be healed. This passage is of great importance because it gives us in brief summary the three great activities of Jesus’ life.

1. **He came proclaiming and preaching the gospel.** Preaching is proclamation of certainties. Therefore Jesus came to *defeat men’s Ignorance*. He came to tell them the truth about God, that which they themselves could have never found out. He came to put an end their guessing and to groping, and to show men what God is like.
2. **He came teaching in the synagogues:** There is a difference in teaching and preaching. Preaching is uncompromising proclamation of certainties and teaching is the explanation of the meaning and the significance of them. Therefore Jesus came to defeat men’s misunderstandings. There are times when men know the truth but misinterpret it. They know the truth but draw the wrong conclusions from it. Jesus came to tell men the meaning of true religion.
3. **He came healing all those who had need of healing:** That is to say, Jesus came healing to defeat men’s pain. The important thing about Jesus is that he was not satisfied with simply telling men the truth in words; he came to turn the truth into deeds. Any ideal is not yours until it is realized in action. Jesus realized his own teaching in deeds of help and healing.

Jesus came preaching that he might defeat all ignorance; he came teaching that he might defeat all misunderstandings. He came healing that he might defeat all pains.

We, too must proclaim our certainties; we, too must be ready to explain our faith; we, too must turn the ideal into action and into deeds.

Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Allan Ekstedt	27 August	Numbers 13,33	26 August
Christine Osman	24 August	Psalms 27,14	14 August
Dan Izzett	28 August	Psalms 57	1 August
David Beazley	14 August	Psalms 58	2 August
David, King of Israel	1, 2, 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23, 29 August	Psalms 59	8 August
Joydeepa Darlong MD	17, 18, 19, 20, 21 August	Psalms 60	9 August
Norman Lazonby	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12 August	Psalms 61	15 August
Peter Laubscher	26 August	Psalms 62	16 August
Peter Waddup	13 August	Psalms 63	22 August
Pradeep and Sarah Failbus	31 August	Psalms 64	23 August
Raju PLN Dr	25 August	Psalms 65	29 August
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		Matthew 5,10	12 August
		Mark 1,35	24 August
		Mark 8,9	25 August
		John 15,12-17	17, 18, 19, 20, 21 August
		2 Peter 1,3-4	28 August

The Bridge

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