



TLM Daily Devotions

February 2024





Intro to the month of February

God is the best editor!

When I put together this publication and collected the Bible verses, I couldn't believe my eyes: there are three devotions about the very same Scripture from the short book of the prophet Habakkuk! One from Christine Osman, two from Trevor Durston! What an inspiration!

How much hope, promise and encouragement it sounds like! There is not a too small book or a little-known author who would not become important in God's hands! This is how Habakkuk now came into the spotlight of our February edition – bless the Word of God among us today!

Marta



Growing in criticism

“He who heeds reprobation is honored” Proverbs 13:18

Solomon said, “He who heeds reproof is honored.” » How to grow with criticism?

- 1) Know that criticism is often a compliment. Furthermore, the sun only dazzles those who look at it directly. Jesus said, “Blessed are you when men hate you, because your reward will be great” (Luke 6:22).
When the truth is uncomfortable, we tend to put others down.
- 2) Accept my faults. Humility helps us endure judgment.
- 3) Remember that “the words of the wicked are bloody snares, but the mouth of the upright delivers them” (Pr 12:6). If I invite my friends to correct me, it will be all the less painful with my enemies!
- 4) Let criticism improve me, instead of making me angry. Peter said, “If you endure suffering while doing good, it is grace in the sight of God” (1Pe 2:20).
- 5) Ignore criticism based on the wrong reasons. I don’t let myself be crushed by the bitterness of others!
- 6) Maintain a sense of proportion. A hurtful word doesn't take away the good in me.
- 7) Take a step back. I criticize others myself, so I have to be kinder!
- 8) Pray for my detractors. It is a way to counter their wickedness and make them better, because hatred is a poison.
- 9) Address God, the only judge. What does he think of me?
- 10) Move forward. With confidence I finish what I start, for God’s promises are to those who are patient (see Heb 6:12).

Help me Jesus Christ to accept criticism!

Grandir dans la critique

« Celui qui tient compte de la réprimande est honoré » Proverbes 13.18

Salomon a dit : « Celui qui tient compte de la réprimande est honoré. » Comment grandir avec la critique ?

- 1) Savoir que la critique est souvent un compliment. De plus, le soleil n'éblouit que ceux qui le regardent en face. Jésus a dit : « Heureux serez-vous, lorsque les hommes vous haïront, parce que votre récompense sera grande » (Lu 6.22). Quand la vérité dérange, on a tendance à rabaisser les autres.
- 2) Accepter mes défauts. L'humilité aide à supporter le jugement.
- 3) Me souvenir que « les paroles des méchants sont des embûches sanglantes, mais la bouche des hommes droits les délivre » (Pr 12.6). Si j'invite mes amis à me reprendre, ce sera d'autant moins pénible avec mes ennemis !
- 4) Laisser la critique m'améliorer, au lieu de me mettre en colère. Pierre dit : « Si tout en faisant le bien, vous supportez la souffrance, c'est une grâce devant Dieu » (1P 2.20).
- 5) Ignorer la critique fondée sur de mauvaises raisons. Je ne me laisse pas écraser par l'amertume des autres !
- 6) Garder le sens des proportions. Une parole blessante n'enlève en rien ce qu'il y a de bon en moi.
- 7) Prendre du recul. Moi-même je critique les autres, je dois donc me montrer plus aimable !
- 8) Prier pour mes détracteurs. C'est un moyen de contrer leur méchanceté et de les rendre meilleurs, car la haine est un poison.
- 9) S'adresser à Dieu, le seul juge. Que pense-t-il de moi ?
- 10) Aller de l'avant. En toute confiance, je finis ce que j'ai commencé, car les promesses de Dieu sont pour ceux qui sont patients (voir Hé 6.12).

PRIÈRE DU JOUR

Aide-moi Jésus-Christ à accepter la critique

Reverend Elie FOFOLO - Born on August 5, 1964, son of a Baptist Pastor, both parents died. I am a pastor of vocation and formation, in 2001 I had my degree in Theology at the Protestant University in Congo (U.P.C). After working as a Pastor in the local Church of Kingabwa 1 from 2004 to 2011, I had a meeting with Angelika Piefer who headed the Coordination of the Mission against Leprosy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, from where I had this passion for people affected by Leprosy and I invited Angelika to come to World Leprosy Day in our church on Sunday 29/01/2012, in Kingabwa. This work led us to discover two girls from the same family with signs of leprosy, and their brother ended up being infected, but all three were treated and in good health. This sparked this passion to work as a volunteer in raising awareness, mobilization and the relationship with the local churches of the platform "Church of Christ in Congo" (E.C.C in acronym). - In July 2019, I obtained the Master in Psychotrauma, at the

University of Kinshasa, at the Faculty of Medicine. Training that allows me to better listen to and accompany people who suffer trauma and stress for biopsychosocial care. - I am married to only one woman, Madame Espérance since 16/10/1988. From this union God gave us five children including two girls and three boys. Just like Abraham and Sarah, my wife and I, are willing to give up everything and go where the need for the Mission is felt. - Elie Fofolo is currently pastor at the local church of Masina 3, the 15th Congo Baptist Community in Kinshasa



Diet sheet #15 – Let us offer praise!

Let's talk about going on diet!

- Have you ever felt the need to go on a diet? There are multiple reasons for dieting, you need to loose a few kilos, as a spiritual discipline or even to change an eating habit.
- Namely slowing down & less activity because of age, disability or circumstances.
- That's the physical aspect of life

What about our spiritual life?

- Have you got bored “doing” by doing the same routine every day?
- Have you listened to too many forwards from others, podcasts, prophetic words...
- Given your attention to different conspiracy theories?
- Have you lost a few spiritual kgs, put on unnecessary spiritual ideas?

The book of Hebrews has a “**Let-us**” diet!

Hebrews 13:15-16 NIVUK

*“Through Jesus, therefore, **let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise** – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*

Heartfelt sacrificial praise is non-ritualistic worship.

Ephesians 2:8-10 NIVUK

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 NIVUK

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!”

Galatians 6:14-16 NIVUK

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule – to the Israel of God.”

- It is a vocal activity declaring our salvation through Jesus Christ and Him alone.
- Many times declaring and sharing our salvation is difficult because of our audience or the crowd we find ourselves in.
- This requires us to be bold in our proclamation of the finished work of the cross.

Romans 1:16-17 NIVUK "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

Our testimony to others of the saving grace, the sin forgiving power of the Blood of Jesus, our eternal destination and our hope in Christ is our sacrifice of praise.

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 ALM and TLM. We have relocated to the UK to live with our children.



Psalm 54

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A *maskil* of David. When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, "Is not David hiding among us?"

¹ Save me, O God, by your name;
vindicate me by your might.

² Hear my prayer, O God;
listen to the words of my mouth.

³ Arrogant foes are attacking me;
ruthless people are trying to kill me—
people without regard for God.

⁴ Surely God is my help;
the Lord is the one who sustains me.

⁵ Let evil recoil on those who slander me;
in your faithfulness destroy them.

⁶ I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you;
I will praise your name, LORD, for it is good.

⁷ You have delivered me from all my troubles,
and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.



Psalm 55

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A *maskil* of David.

¹ Listen to my prayer, O God,
do not ignore my plea;
² hear me and answer me.
My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught
³ because of what my enemy is saying,
because of the threats of the wicked;
for they bring down suffering on me
and assail me in their anger.
⁴ My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen on me.
⁵ Fear and trembling have beset me;
horror has overwhelmed me.
⁶ I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.
⁷ I would flee far away
and stay in the desert;
⁸ I would hurry to my place of shelter,
far from the tempest and storm."
⁹ Lord, confuse the wicked, confound their words,
for I see violence and strife in the city.
¹⁰ Day and night they prowl about on its walls;
malice and abuse are within it.
¹¹ Destructive forces are at work in the city;
threats and lies never leave its streets.
¹² If an enemy were insulting me,
I could endure it;
if a foe were rising against me,
I could hide.
¹³ But it is you, a man like myself,
my companion, my close friend,
¹⁴ with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship
at the house of God,
as we walked about
among the worshipers.

¹⁵ Let death take my enemies by surprise;
let them go down alive to the realm of the dead,
for evil finds lodging among them.

¹⁶ As for me, I call to God,
and the LORD saves me.

¹⁷ Evening, morning and noon
I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice.

¹⁸ He rescues me unharmed
from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me.

¹⁹ God, who is enthroned from of old,
who does not change—
he will hear them and humble them,
because they have no fear of God.

²⁰ My companion attacks his friends;
he violates his covenant.

²¹ His talk is smooth as butter,
yet war is in his heart;
his words are more soothing than oil,
yet they are drawn swords.

²² Cast your cares on the LORD
and he will sustain you;
he will never let
the righteous be shaken.

²³ But you, God, will bring down the wicked
into the pit of decay;
the bloodthirsty and deceitful
will not live out half their days.
But as for me, I trust in you.



Where are today's rescuers?

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Romans 10¹⁴⁻¹⁵

The second week of our most recent holiday we spent on Lewis staying in a cottage in Port of Ness near the top of the island.

One of the walks we most enjoyed was a circular walk from the village of Eoropie taking in the Butt of Lewis lighthouse, which is unusual for Scotland, as it is constructed of red brick.

About a mile along the coastal path, you come to a memorial plaque to 12 fishermen lost at sea.

'On the 5th of March 1885 two boat crews from Eoropie were attempting to land in a sheltered cove but the force of the wind, tide and a strong under-current drove their boats onto the rocks.

All this happened in broad daylight with all remaining villagers on the shore and on the rocks making every effort to save the men. Time and again the rescuers were beaten back by the ferocity of the wind and waves. At the end of the day 9 women were widows and 22 children fatherless.'

The only positive to take from this tragedy was the way the whole village worked together tirelessly and urgently, even putting themselves in danger, to save those in peril.

There is a tragedy of even vaster proportions that is happening all around us today.

A spiritual tragedy

People in peril. Lives being shipwrecked day in day out.

Amy Carmichael, a missionary in India, described this spiritual tragedy in a vision.

"I stood on a grassy plain, and at my feet a precipice broke sheer down into infinite space. I looked but saw no bottom.

I saw forms of people moving single file along the grass. They were making for the edge.

I saw more streams of people flowing from all quarters. All were blind, stone blind; all made straight for the precipice edge."

In her dream, Amy Carmichael said, "I cried from the depths of my soul, 'Why doesn't someone tell them about the precipice and warn them of their danger?' Then, she said, I heard the voice of God saying, 'Who shall I send?' And I said, 'I'll go. I'll go.' 'All Right,' said the Lord, 'Then you're my messenger.'"

Her vision finishes with her asking herself these questions.

What does it matter, after all? It has gone on for years; it will go on for years. Why make such a fuss about it?

C T Studd (Missionary to China, India and Africa), seeing the same spiritual tragedy as Amy Carmichael, made this comment. "Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell."

Who is staffing the rescue shop today?

Who is warning anyone of their spiritual peril?

Am I? Are you?

John Twynam – Perkins - Formerly chair of TLM Scotland



Do not disturb!

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.

Mark 14:37

I was on a long haul flight to Singapore. Among the papers in the pocket of the seat in front of me was a bit of coloured card. On it, in large bright letters, it said, "Do Not Disturb."

When you want to sleep you put your seat into its recline position, sometimes to the annoyance of the person sitting behind, display the notice and close your eyes. It's supposed to prevent interruptions. It doesn't always work, particularly if you're in an aisle seat and someone wants to get past you to go to the loo.

I thought it would be great if I could carry the notice around all the time, wherever I was. "Do Not Disturb." Bad news? Problems in the Middle East? Someone needing my help? "Do Not Disturb." Just let me roll over and sleep. But it wouldn't work and I don't believe it should.

We need to be disturbed at times, to be jolted out of our comfortable ruts - by injustice, by suffering - and we have no inborn right to an easy life. And if we're disturbed enough by what goes on around us we might just start doing something to help.

One last thing. If we did manage to sleep through the problems, we might miss the joys of life as well. I wouldn't want to do that. Would you?

Lord, life with you can be uncomfortable. Keep me awake, the excitement makes it all worthwhile.

Eddie Askew (1927-2007) devoted half a century to leprosy and its consequences. In 1950 he and his wife Barbara set sail for India. Eddie's first placement was in Purulia, West Bengal. In 1965 Eddie took up the post of executive secretary at TLM's office in London. His first overseas visit in this new role was to Ethiopia, where he learned of plans to set up a leprosy training centre that would benefit patients and medics throughout Africa. He offered to become a founding member and signed TLM up to support what was to become ALERT (All Africa Leprosy and Rehabilitation Training Centre). The following year, the organisation now known as the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP) was set up. In 1974 Eddie became general director of TLM. He was keen to develop TLM's work elsewhere, and took a team into the closed land of Bhutan in response to a request from its government. - Inspired by his travels and his Christian faith, Eddie found an outlet for his creativity in painting and poetry. He retired in 1987. From 1998 until his death he was TLM- vice-president, and in 2000 he was awarded an OBE. (Fiona Spence)



Seen, heard, concerned, sent

The weather in the Cape has conspired against me in recent days, making it hard to indulge my love of photographing the night sky. However, there was a brief break in the clouds a few nights ago and I pointed my camera at one of the few promising patches of dark night sky. I didn't expect much, so I was surprised when a few hours later, a pleasing picture flickered into view of the Flame Nebula, a close companion to the ethereal Horsehead. The pair are one of the dominant and justly popular features of the evening sky during the Southern Summer and Northern Winter.

It's impossible to look at this part of the sky without thinking about Exodus chapter three. The magnificent Flame Nebula looks for all the world [for all the heavens?] like a flaming bush:

"... behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." Exodus 3:2

I glance at my feet a notice that I've kicked off my sandals.

The build-up in chapter three of Exodus is so interesting: "I have seen the misery..."; "I have heard them cry out"; "I am concerned"; "I have come down"; ... and ... "I am sending you!"

Across the intervening centuries, as you read this passage, you can still hear Moses gulp. Did he regret going up to look at the burning bush?

How did you feel the first time the Lord spoke these words to you? If you're part of His work, it will be in part because He has pointed out to you the misery of others; He has made you attentive to their cry; He gave you a burden for their welfare; and then He said, "I'm sending you."

"Lord, I know you never get it wrong, but could be your first mistake?" "Who am I?"

Other people always look better equipped than us, more eloquent, more qualified, more suitable.

Maybe.

But the point is, He called you, and that is enough.

When I look at the heavens through my lens, I see a different world. You can't see it and not be changed by the view.

When we look at the World through His lens – His Word – it changes you too. It is a burning bush experience. Through it, God reveals His character to you. In turn, your character and values change too. That's what it means to be called.

Daunting? For sure. But take comfort from this – when Moses led his people through the sea, he did so on dry ground. He will part the sea for you too, but you will need to walk to the shore. Let us pray for each other today that when we go down to the shore, that we might find dry ground beneath our feet.

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.



The messenger.

In the ancient Near East, runners and messengers played an important role because they enabled communication between people and distant groups. The messenger, as the name suggests, is the bearer of a message. He carries a document or words that he has received from the one who sends it. He can add nothing to it. He has a mission. That mission must be decisive. As with the witness, he can be the bearer of good news. He can also be the bearer of a message that is difficult to hear, but whose purpose is always to lead the recipient of the message towards a path of reconciliation, of forgiveness, of renunciation, or of continuing on a path of error.

We have an example of this with King David who drove Absalom into exile after Absalom killed his brother. In **2 Samuel 14**, the prophet Joab uses a messenger from Tekoa to deliver a message. In vs 3 *"You shall go to the king, and this is what you shall say to him"*. And Joab told her what she should say. She tells David that she is a widow and has two sons. They quarreled in the fields. One of them beat the other to death. The entire clan wanted her to hand over her remaining son to them to put to death. She asked the king for indulgence to intervene. He is committed to protecting her. David understands that she is passing on a message to him that concerns him. He said to her in verse 18. "Do not hide anything from me... Didn't Joab plot all this with you? She said to him, "Your servant did this to put it another way." When the king called Joab and said to him, "Go and bring back the young Absalom." David was challenged by this message he received from Tekoa's wife. He will try to better feelings toward Absalom.

In Proverbs 25:13 we read, "The cooling effect of the snow on a harvest day is the effect of a faithful messenger to him who sends him: He comforts his master."

Our role as messengers is to promote communication between people and God, to remind us, and them, that we have a compassionate God, who wants to bless everyone and who will reveal things that hurt. First of all, he will make us aware of our nature as sinners, and in order to free ourselves from it, we will go down a path where we will see things we have to put down, to settle, behaviors perhaps to change, or requests for forgiveness to make or to grant. But it's worth it, because the result is peace, and peace is priceless.

Eric Chollet - I'm retired since four years. I used to work with TLM Switzerland for 32 years. During that time, I have had the privilege to stand in different committees (e.g. executive committee - directorate) with TLMI, which has been very rewarding. All along these years of service, I have met a lot of wonderful and dedicated people. May God continue to bless the mission for His glory.

Le messenger.

Au Proche-Orient antique, les coureurs et les messagers avaient un rôle important parce qu'ils permettaient la communication entre les hommes et des groupes éloignés l'un de l'autre.

Le messager, comme son nom l'indique, est porteur d'un message. Il transmet un document ou des paroles qu'il a reçues de celui qui l'envoie. Il n'a rien à y ajouter. Il a une mission. Sa mission peut être déterminante. Comme pour le témoin, il peut être porteur d'une bonne nouvelle. Il peut aussi être porteur d'un message difficile à entendre mais dont le but est toujours de conduire celui qui reçoit le message vers un chemin de réconciliation, de pardon, de renonciation à poursuivre sur une voie d'égarement. Nous en avons un exemple avec le roi David qui avait poussé Absalom à l'exil après qu'Absalom eut tué son frère. 2 Samuel 14. Le prophète Joab utilise une messagère de Tekoa pour lui faire passer un message. V 3 « Tu iras trouver le roi et voici ce que tu lui diras. Et Joab lui précisa ce qu'elle devait dire. Elle raconte à David qu'elle est veuve, qu'elle avait deux fils. Ils se sont disputés dans les champs. L'un des deux a frappé l'autre à mort. Le clan tout entier voulait qu'elle leur livre son fils restant pour le mettre à mort. Elle demande l'indulgence au roi pour qu'il intervienne. Celui-ci s'engage à la protéger. David comprend qu'elle est en train de lui passer un message qui le concerne. Il lui dit : 18 « Ne me cache rien... Joab n'a-t-il pas tout manigancé tout cela avec toi ? » Elle lui dit : C'est pour présenter les choses d'une autre manière que ton serviteur a fait cela. Sur ce fait, le roi appelle Joab et lui dit : Vas-y donc, ramène le jeune Absalom. David a été remis en question par ce message reçu de la femme de Tekoa. Il va revenir à de meilleurs sentiments à l'égard d'Absalom.

Prov. 25 :13 « L'effet rafraîchissant de la neige un jour de moisson, voilà l'effet d'un messager fidèle pour celui qui l'envoie : Il reconforte son maître. »

Notre rôle du messager est de favoriser la communication entre les hommes et Dieu, de rappeler que nous avons un Dieu compatissant, qui veut bénir chacun et -ci va révéler des choses qui font mal. Elle va tout d'abord nous faire prendre conscience de notre nature de pécheur, et pour nous en libérer, cela va passer par un chemin au cours duquel nous aurons des choses à déposer, à régler, des comportements peut-être à changer ou des demandes de pardon à faire ou à accorder. Mais la démarche en vaut la peine, car le résultat est la paix et la paix n'a pas de prix.



Jesus will love through us!

Acts 9:1-19

In January, my church celebrates the conversion of St Paul (Saul). In my mind it has the air of a cowboy film, with Paul on his horse galloping into town to make the arrests. What is certain is that Paul was determined to wipe out Christianity. It didn't fit with his belief model, or all that he had been taught. It outraged him. The only answer was to wipe it from the face of the earth. Does that fanaticism and anger sound familiar?

The only answer was for the Lord to intervene. He spoke personally to Paul saying, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" Jesus aligns himself with His followers. It was Him who was being persecuted. Paul's answer is interesting. He obviously knew that the voice belonged to someone of importance, therefore he called him Lord, but as yet he didn't know who Jesus was. Paul's mind was closed tight. The Lord had to open it so that he could see the truth. He did that by making Paul blind. He robbed him of the resources that he would have used to argue his case; that is, the Torah or the law. I think Jesus didn't want him going back to the old arguments. He wanted him to pray and meditate and to think things through. I wonder if his viewing of the stoning of Stephen and Stephen's sermon came back into his mind and gave him food for thought.

The other character in this story is Ananias. I love him and his reaction. It is so real. "Lord, you must be mad. This fellow is the one who is killing us and you want me to go and speak to him?" So the Lord explains that Paul is going to be a special person in the kingdom. Ananias doesn't need asking twice. Off he goes to visit Paul and he reaches out to him in love right from the beginning. "Brother Saul" Ananias says. Isn't that great? Whatever his fears and doubts Ananias was there reaching out in love to help Paul find his way to Jesus. He lays hands on Paul and Paul can see once more. Then I'm sure Ananias introduced him to the other disciples in Damascus. I wonder what Paul felt as he realised that he was accepted, loved and forgiven not only by Jesus but also by His people.

Here is a challenge for us, to love those who persecute us and pray for those who would do us harm. Paul was full of anger and disgust and that led him to persecute and kill. With Jesus in his life and full of the Holy Spirit he became full of love and forgiveness too and was able to write that wonderful hymn in Corinthians 13. That kind of love is supernatural.

When we find it impossible to love, if we ask God, He will love through us.

In loving memory of **June Nash** - June is now retired. She worked for TLM as missionary, trainer and director.



Psalm 56

For the director of music. To the tune of “A Dove on Distant Oaks.” Of David. A *miktam*. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.

¹ Be merciful to me, my God,
for my enemies are in hot pursuit;
all day long they press their attack.
² My adversaries pursue me all day long;
in their pride many are attacking me.
³ When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.
⁴ In God, whose word I praise—
in God I trust and am not afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?
⁵ All day long they twist my words;
all their schemes are for my ruin.
⁶ They conspire, they lurk,
they watch my steps,
hoping to take my life.
⁷ Because of their wickedness do not let them escape;
in your anger, God, bring the nations down.
⁸ Record my misery;
list my tears on your scroll—
are they not in your record?
⁹ Then my enemies will turn back
when I call for help.
By this I will know that God is for me.
¹⁰ In God, whose word I praise,
in the LORD, whose word I praise—
¹¹ in God I trust and am not afraid.
What can man do to me?
¹² I am under vows to you, my God;
I will present my thank offerings to you.
¹³ For you have delivered me from death
and my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before God
in the light of life.



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.



'Bless me first!'

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 *Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request.*

Jabez is a man of whom we know virtually nothing. Let's start with his name. (It appears also as a place-name in 1 Chronicles 2:55.) Would you think of naming your child 'pain'? His mother said it was a deliberate choice (1 Chronicles 4:9); Jabez apparently sounds like the Hebrew word for pain, but it's a strange name to give your boy!

The record of Jabez is just a two-verse interruption in a list of names four chapters long. Why? He's like a historical 'add-on'! He's not even named in the lists, so we don't know what family he was in. All we know is (1) *"he was more honourable (most translations) than his brothers"* (v. 9), and (2) *"God granted his request"* (v.10).

I'm sure that the reason he comes through to us is his prayer. Why do you think God *"granted his request"*? Was it because he was *"more honourable than his brothers"*? That seems unlikely when we consider examples of less 'honourable' people who prayed, -and whose requests were granted... or were not!

The story goes of a Christian conference delegate who walked past the door of the main speaker and overheard him praying before his presentation. *"Oh, that you would bless me..."* The eavesdropper felt he should be praying for his audience, for people to respond, for his talk to have impact. His prayer seemed self-centred. How would you pray in such situations?

Jabez teaches a fundamental lesson: it is as we ask God to bless us, as we open ourselves to receive from Him *first*, that we can more effectively be His servant for others. Jesus said to Peter *"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me"* (John 13:8). How often do we (*do !!*) start by praying that God will bless what we do, those we meet and so on. That's fine, but the *primary* thing is neglected: we need to ask God to bless (to love, cleanse, forgive, fill, comfort) us *first*; only then will we serve effectively. It's like the instruction in the aeroplane to put your oxygen mask on first, to avoid passing out before you can help others! Perhaps we have known -or been- someone who was continually doing 'good works' to the point of spiritual and physical self-neglect and even 'burnout'... is that God's way?

It is sometimes said that churches have too many pipes and not enough tanks. Pipes rush things through without holding onto anything; tanks fill up and overflow. So let's learn from 'the Jabez prayer' to be 'tanks'!

I don't know what Jabez meant by *"enlarge my territory"*... in our prayers that can mean what best fits our situation. We can understand *"Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm"*, and we all want to *"be free from pain"*. But I wonder whether that last request is something to do with the meaning of his name, - as if he were praying, *"so that I will not be a pain"*... There's a thought!

May God bless you (first!) today,

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 TLM by leading retreat days and other such things as opportunity allows. He has recently retired from the pastorate but continues as a volunteer speaker for TLM



"Don't push the sun."

"A time to be silent and a time to speak" Ecclesiastes 3:7

Today was going to be a great day. After weeks of studying the local language, learning the people's culture, getting to know them, eating and living with them, the chief had finally promised that he was ready to respond to my request to be given permission to preach the gospel in his village.

With time to spare, I made my way to the appointed mango tree on the hill. He was there to welcome me. After the usual greetings, I sat down on the ground and waited for him to begin the conversation.

After what seemed an eternity but was in fact about one hour, he asked "Where is the sun?" Surprised and confused I said "there it is baba" (a sign of respect towards an older person). This was followed by another long period of silence and then the same question. By this time I was wondering about his sanity and becoming increasingly frustrated.

Finally he asked me "Where was the sun when you arrive?" Fortunately I had noticed and could point out the spot to him. Now he started talking. "The sun moved from there to here without you pushing it. You are young and impatient to bring us your message. What you share with us will destroy many of our traditions and the young will lose respect for our religious culture. I believe that we need to hear what you bring and I give you permission to tell us about Jesus, but please don't forget that we are not numbers or statistics, we are people with feelings. Don't push the sun."

Jesus had a plan for the world but took time for the individuals. He listened to them, respected them and showed that He cared for them.

We are not called upon to implement a programme or sell a product but to reach out to individuals. We need to know if, when and how to speak or act.

Prayer. "Father give me the love for people that comes from You that I may be sensitive to their needs and respect them as individuals created in your image and not treat them as objects.

Silvano Perotti . Secretary for Europe then Deputy International Director and Director for Support and Development TLMI
Born in Italy - retired in Switzerland.
Worked with TLMI until 1990.



Christ and His Presence

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:11 ESV

The greatest blessing that any child of God can possess in this world is **Christ's presence!**

Wherever and whenever Christ appears, the situation of things cannot remain the same.

His presence brings light that makes every situation of chaos and darkness disappear. This was first witnessed at the creation in Genesis 1: 2-3 *"the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light: and there was light."*

In the healing of a man born blind Jesus Christ said, 'as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world' John 9:5 and he fully restore the sight of the blind man.

Christ's presence is in the wilderness as the Israelites follow the Pillar of fire in the night and the pillar of cloud in the day. Exodus 13:21-22. The Children of Israelites never moved or took any further step if the cloud refuse to move.

His presence brought eternal peace to mankind on earth. At his birth the angels proclaimed His peace. Luke 2: 13-14,

His presence at a wedding brings new and inexhaustible sweet wine - John 2:1-10. No doubt if we want to enjoy our marriage, we need His presence and we must be ready to do what He ask us to do and not follow the worldly counsel.

Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power such that anywhere He went, He was doing good, His presence changes situations from death to life, sinners to saint and brings healing from sickness and deliverance from the power of darkness and sin. Act 10:38

His presence can also bring disruption/interruption into our lives. He went into the temple and swept out and cleansed the temple from those who had turn the house of prayer to den of robbers by doing shady business John 2:13-17. Peter the fisherman was transformed to be a fisher of men and Christ even predicted how he would die. John 21:17. Paul the Apostle was interrupted on his way to Damascus when he encountered Jesus in Act 9:3-18. His life was never the same again, the one who was persecuting the Christians became a preacher of the gospel.

As we set our eyes on Him this year 2024, may His presence transform us into His image 2 Corinthians 3:16-18. May He distinguish us and set us apart from others. May His presence go with us, may His mercy and compassion accompany us just as Moses prayed in the wilderness Exodus 33:12-23. May His peace and His word dwell in us richly as we faithfully seek Him.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 NIV

Let's invite Him in, let's give Him space and let's seek Him with all our heart. He is faithful and willing to guide us and beam His light into our path as we navigate this dark, complex, complicated and fragile world that we live in.

Bunmi Oluloto - Bunmi and Loveth Oluloto with their 3 children are Servants of Christ and Missionary with The Leprosy Mission based in Niger Republic; Bunmi is TLM Country Director for Niger and Chad



Attitudes

Defying Envy

Scripture: Luke 15:11-32 Romans 8:31-39

Why do we envy the happiness and the goods of others? Because we are proud; we should like to be the sole possessors of talents, riches, of the esteem and love of all the world! —Saint John Vianney

Does your attitude ever change when certain people show up? Our attitudes are influenced by our thoughts and feelings about things and people, so it makes sense that some people might get us more stirred up than others. Instead of focusing on God's blessings in our lives, we might look at what God has done for someone else and say, "I wish that were me." That's the feeling of envy.

Envy is the desire to have what someone else has, and it can lead to dangerous shifts in attitude, including resentment.

Envy is a theme of one of Jesus' best-known parables: the parable of the prodigal son. In this story, a young man is eager to receive his father's wealth and asks for his inheritance early. In this time and culture, such a request would have communicated that he wished his father had died already. Envy can lead to this kind of behaviour—viewing people as little more than their stuff and success.

The son squanders the wealth he envied by living a life beyond his means. When he realizes he's reached the end of himself and that he'd be better off as a slave in his father's home, he returns, defeated. But Jesus' story contains a twist. Rather than turn his son away, the father runs to his son, embraces him, and throws a lavish party to welcome him home.

Envy isn't done yet, though. The young man has an older brother who watches all of this play out. The older brother so deeply resents the grace extended to his sibling that he berates his father and misses the whole party. When we allow envy to colour our view of others, we can unintentionally block our view of the abundance of our heavenly Father's grace.

But grace is enough. When confronted with the feeling of envy, we don't have to let it influence our attitudes. The father in Jesus' story allowed grace and abundance to shape his attitude toward his son, and we can do the same, no matter who we're having trouble loving. Our heavenly Father loves us and the person we envy with the same lavish & Agape Love. How do we defy envy? By receiving and extending grace.

To whom will you extend grace this week? In what ways do you need to receive grace?

Pray: God, thank You that Your blessings fall on everyone. If there is any envy in my heart, please help me surrender it to You. Help me to love You all the more for Your heart to bless, instead of criticizing, help me to show your kindness to others. Let me be more clearly aware of Your deep grace for me and find contentment in it. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Can you name 4 of the 9 prophetesses in the Bible ?!

Exodus 15:20 - "Then MIRIAM the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing."

Judges 4:4 - "Now DEBORAH, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time."

2Kings22:14- "So Hilkiah the priest, and (others)...went to HULDAH the prophetess, the wife of Shallum...keeper of the wardrobe..."

Isaiah 8:3 - "And I(=Isaiah) went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, 'Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz'."

Luke 2:36 - "And there was a prophetess ANNA, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years...84... she did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day."

Acts 21:9 - "He(=Philip the evangelist and one of the first seven deacons in Jerusalem) had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied..."

CONCLUSION: Jeremiah7:25,26-"From the day your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all My servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to Me....but stiffened their neck."

1 Cor.14:1 - "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."

Biblical prophesying today, generally speaking, is Holy Spirit inspired encouragement - laced with much Gospel content for an individual or for a group of people!

Church leaders and fellow prophets should always monitor and verify all prophetic pronouncements made in the local assembly. It is a gift for edification predominantly.

The Canon of Scripture is closed, and so the Bible as we have it today, remains as our final authority in all matters exclusively! -Amen.



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.^[a]
- 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.”



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.



„You’ll never walk alone“ – Part 1

Live by Christ

Jesus Your Savior, Friend, Helper, Guide
Put yourself in the hands of your Maker

„For to live is Christ and to die is gain. “ Philippines 1 v.21

Forgetting what is behind me and reaching for that which lies ahead, I press toward towards the goal to win the prize which is God’s call to the life above in Christ Jesus. Philippines 3v13-14

Wow the past behind and ahead to live in Christ and with Christ.

For in all things we are His beloved children.

I count everything sheer loss, because all is far outweighed by the gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
Philippines 3v8

Riches wealth and fame have no value if they are not put to use for our heavenly father. I know that my husband Josef left behind a well working farm to serve the Lord in India. How rich his life was as the result. Rich on friends Rich on feeling what one was doing was worthwhile. The same was for me. The poor are so thankful Their smiles are riches enough.

The Lord seeks us His lost sheep.

My own sheep listen to my voice and I know them and they follow me. John 10v 27

When we are confused, feel unloved and unwanted a prayer brings us close to Jesus. His love shows us the way.

Christ said „I am the **Way**, the **Truth** and the **Life**“ John 14v.6

Christ the Way with all its surprises. The truth He will reveal, Christ through his Holy Spirit shows us the life. He promises a life in abundance.

The **love of God** which is in Christ Jesus. „As he father loved me so love I you John „15 v9

Yes when we are loved and Jesus does love us then we are never alone.

Not only that

He commanded us „**to love one another** as I have loved you“ John 15 v. 12

Surrounded my God’s love and so love one another.

Let this light flow deep into our hearts.

Paul says „For me to live is Christ and to die is gain “ Philippine 1 v 21

Doris Kückmann - worked with the Leprosy mission in India from 1968 to 1974. These wonderful years of helping the patients giving them back their worth and sharing Christ with them I will never forget. I am now a widow living in Germany although i am a born Canadian.



„You'll never walk alone“ – Part 2

Live in Christ

Love Abounding in Knowledge and judgment Philipppines 1v9

With **abounding love** around us in Christ we are never alone.
Rejoice in the Lord. Happiness in our heart as we rejoice in Him

Pray without ceasing Acts 12v5

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; Continuing instant in prayer Romans 12v12
Jesus gives us the **strength** and the **courage** of all of these things He wants us to do. He shows us how and what to do.

Pray to the Father which is in secret and your Father who sees which is secret will reward you. Mat 6 v 6
Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it shall be opened. Luke 11v 9-10
So we learn to **pray for one another** -We are not alone but thinking of others

If you, then, bad as you are, know how to give your children what is good for them, how much more will your heavenly Father give **good things** to those who ask him Matt 7 v 11
Wonderful what our heavenly Father does for us and through us.

God was in Christ personally reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sins against them and has commissioned us with the message of reconciliation. 11 Cor 5 v.19
God wants all His children to be **reconciled** with him through His son our savior Jesus. The best news that there ever was. We are all one is this family through Christ.

To all who received him, to those who believed in His name gave the right to become **children of God**. John 1v12

For all who are moved by the Spirit of God are sons of God. The spirit that you have received is not a spirit of Slavery leading you back into a life of fear, but a Spirit that make us sons, enabling us to cry 'Abba! Father!' In that cry the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are **God's children**; and if children, then heirs. We are **God's heirs** and Christ's fellow-heirs, if we share his sufferings now in order to share his splendor hereafter. Romans 8 v. 15-17

Jesus said " **I and my Father are one**" John 10v 30.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond or free, thee is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus

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„You’ll never walk alone“ – Part 3

Live for Christ

To speak the Word without fear Philippines 1v.4

For many of us we might find this not so easy but exactly this Word is what the world needs. Recently I heard about a Christine on China. For this he was in prison misused, beaten etc.

My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus Philippine 4 v.19
What a wonderful promise the Lord gives us.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippine 4v13

All through my life when I was faced with a difficult task and was afraid I said this verse. This is God’s will to strengthen us in our time of need.

“For I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you took me in. Naked and you clothed me I was sick and you visited me I was in prison and you came to me”
Mat. 25V 35-36

None of us can do all things things at one time but when we have the chance we should not close our eyes but do what we can. The Lord promises to give us the strength to do so.

It is His will for to love, to forgive, to understand, to be open, caring and seeing.

In our Lord’s prayer Acknowledge God’s Holiness, Let this earth be like heaven then our need daily break, forgiveness, as we forgive others help when we are tempted and deliverance from evil for in the end God’s kingdom has the last say, His power and the glory.

“In all thy ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your path” Proverb 3v,6

Jesus our daily guide, our councilor and director in life.

“Go ye therefore and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Matt 28 v 19-20

In the prayer of St. Frances

Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace

Where there is hatred let me sow love

Where there is injury let me bring pardon

Where there is discord let me bring union

Where there is error, let me bring truth

Where there is doubt faith

Where there is despair, hope

Where there is darkness, light

where there is sadness, joy

*O master let me not seek as much
to be consoled as to consoled
To be understood as to understand
To beloved as to love
for it is in giving that we receive
it is in self-forgetting that one finds
It is in pardoning that one is pardoned
It is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.*

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„You'll never walk alone“ – Part 4

Live like Christ

“Because God's love has flooded our inner most heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us.” Romans 5, 5

See those in need Luke 10 25-37

Pray without ceasing 1Thes 5v.17” Be always joyful; pray continually; give thanks whatever happens; for this is what God in Christ wills for you.”

Lift up in prayer all those you know who need God's healing hand

“but when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there is the secret play, and your father see what is secret will reward you.” Matt 6v.6.

My experience is that where ever we find yourself you can offer up prayer for those in need.

“No one who sets his hand to the plough and then keeps looking back is fit for the kingdom of God” Luke 9 v 62

It simply means if we say Yes to Christ there is no turning back. He promises an abundant life. Exciting it is.

This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.” John 15v 12

*God is love and he helps us to love the not so lovely. Love those who despite fully use you. Not an easy task.
Love justice*

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„You'll never walk alone“ – Part 5

Live with Christ

Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8 v 35, 37-39

This was written when Christians were being persecuted. Living with Christ no need to fear. God's love is unconditional

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever. Heb 13 v 8

We are sometimes feeling but and down but Jesus remains the same for ever.

We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us and gave His life for us. Romans 8 v.37

When we feel overcome, depressed or confused Let us hold onto our faith

In Christ Jesus the life-giving law of the Spirit has set you free from the law of sin and death. Roman 8v 3
What a wonderful promise.

*“...but of him are ye in Christ Jesus who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and Sanctification and redemption, that according as it is written ‘He that glorieth let him Glory in the Lord.’”
1 Corinthians 1v 30-31*

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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.



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.

When the fig tree does not blossom (part 1)

Habakkuk 3:17-19

I remember it well, my last visit with the mission to China for a conference organised by Dr Prabhakar Samson. Our contact in China was Prof Zhang Gou-Cheng, a dedicated doctor heading up the leprosy programme in the country. Before my first visit, a few years previously I had been well briefed in the Chinese culture of exchanging gifts on such occasions, so I had gone well prepared – the gifts exchanged being much appreciated on both sides.

For subsequent visits such formalities were unnecessary, but it was well known that this would be my last, so again I made suitable arrangements. Out staff in Delhi had organised some wrist watches with the TLM logo, and I thought these might be appropriate as gifts for Prof. Zhang and his team, and conveniently I needed to go to Delhi immediately before travelling on to Nanjing.



At the end of the last day of the conference I asked to meet Prof. Zhang privately and passed my gifts over to him for distribution to his team. He received them with many thanks but looked a bit embarrassed – maybe I had misjudged, as it was obvious that he was not expecting anything (which let's face it is how a gift should be!) so he had not prepared anything to give in return.

Morning came, and I was in the hotel reception all packed up and awaiting a taxi to the airport (next stop Shanghai). Prof. Zhang joined me and handed me a small package, which he had clearly purchased that same morning – it was the picture you see here of a leaping deer.

I was delighted to receive it as a memory of my visits to China, but also because it immediately reminded me of one of my favourite Bible passages: *The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights (Habakkuk 3:19)*. This picture now rests on my bedside cabinet as a reminder of God's

presence every morning even when life is tough (more of this tomorrow).

To finish the story, I arrived at Shanghai and spent a day there visiting the leprosy centre, then there was an evening meal with the Chinese team there before flying out the next day to Seoul. At the end of the meal my host told me they had a gift for me. I think Prof Zhang had phoned ahead! They brought out a box the size of a suitcase! When I opened it later in my hotel room it was a heavy wooden model of a sailing ship with good luck characters on the sails. I'm still amazed how I managed to incorporate that into my luggage without having to pay an excess charge! That was certainly an unexpected gift!

When the fig tree does not blossom (part 2)

Habakkuk 3:17-19



To save you guessing, here is the ship. If anyone can read the messages on the sails please do let me know what they say!

I worked with the mission for 13 years, travelled to many countries, and met so many extraordinary people, and especially many courageous people who have suffered so much during their lifetimes that it tore my heart out at times. The introduction of the Wellesley Bailey Awards in 1999 (to mark our 125th anniversary) was a long overdue way of acknowledging this and the incredible achievements of many people affected by leprosy who have risen above their suffering and achieved amazing things for their communities, their nations and even internationally. May God bless each one of them!

The verses of Habakkuk 3:17-19 bear powerful testimony to rising above the misfortunes of the day. For us as Christians, when such misfortunes come close to us, we have to put our trust in God, and he has proved himself faithful over and over again. By the time you read this, Dan and Babs Izzett will have visited my church to share their extraordinary story and bear witness to God's goodness and mercy. The Bridge is a good place to share such stories for our mutual encouragement.

My own journey through life has not been without its challenges, but these last two years have brought significant health issues, as I undergo treatment for two different cancers and write this in the middle of a chemotherapy course following surgery for bowel cancer. But any personal experience I may be having pales into insignificance compared to the suffering which we have all seen (or experienced) caused by leprosy.

So the image of the deer, confident and sure footed, climbing on the heights is precious to me. I hope it also encourages you. The Sovereign Lord is indeed our strength.

Happy New Year (a bit late but still well meant!)

Trevor Durston - General Director from 1993-2006. Now retired and working as a volunteer speaker for TLM.



Paul, a soul that was saved to be a servant

Titus 1:1 "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness."

Saul, the persecutor became Paul, the servant. It did not happen consequent to any theological discussion with some learned men in the Law, preachers or priests. Paul was saved by the grace of God after a humbling personal encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. He was heading there to persecute the believers. He lost his sight and regained it by the grace of God, ministered through Ananias, a believer in Jesus Christ. Ironically, Damascus the city where Paul was saved was where he was headed with the mandate to persecute the believers! There his blindness - spiritual and physical were removed by God by His grace.

What differentiates Jesus from all others is His servanthood to redeem sinful mankind to God. It is to that Jesus, that Paul had submitted himself as a servant. This servanthood came after a traumatic experience. Unless one is challenged severely, the significance of servanthood will not be fully anchored in Christ. Saul was tested to become Paul, the servant. The desires, wishes, purpose, direction, commands of the Master were received by Paul in an attitude of servitude, deserving nothing by his own merits. Paul completely surrendered his soul to the Spirit of God.

When Saul had experienced the grace of God, he then believed in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for the redemption of man's sin – past, present and future. So, he had no option but to submit himself as Paul, the servant of LORD GOD. It was an intentional deference by Paul in gratitude to the saving grace of God. Paul had on his own gave the right over his life to God because he truly realized the transaction that took place on the Cross; God redeeming mankind to himself.

Paul no longer existed by himself, but only Jesus in him. He emptied himself so that the Lord could fill him with the salvation story - promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. He no longer had an identity of his own. His identity was subsumed in the 'servant' identity of Jesus. Paul said in his encouragement to the Philippian church that Jesus had humbled himself to become a man to serve God. Jesus Himself said that He came to 'serve' and not to be 'served'. Paul emulated the servanthood of Jesus Christ. The Pharisee of the Pharisees decided to serve Jesus passionately.

Paul had given his life to serve LORD GOD, Jesus. His interests did not matter any longer. He yielded himself to Jesus fully. His eyes were focused on Jesus only. As a servant, Paul would serve the Lord diligently. He had only one master, not any other master. LORD GOD was his only Master. Paul's allegiance was to Jesus Christ alone, the incarnate God, the Son of God.

In his spirit Paul had accepted Jesus as his Master and the Lord. It was the only way that he could connect with the Spirit of God. Till his martyrdom, Paul had remained a servant of Jesus. He did not consider himself worthy to be crucified in the manner his Master was crucified, but desired to be crucified upside down. Whether they were his travails, tests or testimonies they did not take Paul away from his servanthood. He

was never discouraged by his disasters or become proud of his preaching. The Master (Jesus) and servant (Paul) relationship remained unhindered.

Paul poured out his life into the hands of Jesus and waited on the Lord to be used by Him in His service. It was giving his physical and intellectual abilities to God for His purpose. He had no voice of his own but only that of his Lord's. Paul was first a servant and then an apostle. He went where his master told him to go and preach what His master asked him to preach, The Gospel.

God humbled Saul, the persecutor to become Paul, the servant

In gratitude for His grace

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



I Will Still Celebrate

“Olive trees may be fruitless, and harvest time a failure...but I will still celebrate because the Lord God saves me” Habakkuk 3:17-18

This prayer (vs1) or song, has the musical annotations of a Hebrew psalm, and weaves together words of Habakkuk’s actual prayer (vs 2): the apocalyptic vision of the Lord coming on the clouds to save His people (vs 3-5; cf 1:12-17; 2:2), and Habakkuk’s overwhelmed but faith-filled response (vs 16-19). Read this prayer now, allowing its scene changes, time warps and character switches into your imagination. Begin with Habakkuk, waiting faithfully in Jerusalem, in the rubble of the Babylonians invasion (vs 2). Then follow the action from heaven itself to the mountain peaks near Sinai where the Lord first revealed Himself (vs 3), then across Midian’s tented desert (vs 7) to the Babylonian wetlands (vs 8). Follow the flashbacks to primordial history, creation and flood (vs 4, 6). Keep on the heels of the Lord’s cataclysmic victory (vs 13-15). Then return to ashen-faced Habakkuk, shaking at the knees (16a) because most of this has yet to happen (vs 16b)! God’s saving purpose and love were unmistakable (vs 13; cf vs 3b). Only this love explains why Habakkuk rose above the trauma of his times and lived out the two elements of his prophetic identity. He waited (vs 16b), with joyful, lively faith in his God (vs 17-19).

Finally, worship, in the faith-building words of Habakkuk’s closing hymn (16b-19). I always love these last verses of Habakkuk – no matter what: your circumstances; personal difficulties; the things cause you to lose sleep; climate change; icecap melt; economic situations; war; ...

Lift your voice. Encourage yourself by singing about the goodness of God that you count on – even as everything around you seems to deteriorate. Forget the things that are not working, they do not tell the whole story. Rather, the greater realities are God’s power and wisdom, which make a pleasant way for you. Realise that the words you speak out to God in praise return to you, resonating within you to gladden your heart and lift you up. Rejoice in God because His help is on its way and because He is invigorating you for the heights ahead. No matter what is fruitless or fails – celebrate. Surely, He will help you.

“The sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; He enables me to go on the heights.” Habakkuk 3:19

Dear God, how true it is that praise delights my heart. So, I celebrate you and am encouraged, my glorious God, for your wisdom and strength make me glad. Amen

‘High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.’ (Irish, 8th century)

Authors in ABC Order**Country****Textuaries in Canonical Order**

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Bunmi Oluloto</i> | <i>14 February</i> | <i>Niger/Nigeria</i> | | Exode 3,2 | <i>7 February</i> |
| <i>Christine Osman</i> | <i>29 February</i> | <i>Scotland</i> | | 2 Sam 14,3 | <i>8 February</i> |
| <i>Dan Izzett</i> | <i>2 February</i> | <i>Zimbabwe/UK</i> | | 1 Chrin 4,9-10 | <i>12 February</i> |
| <i>David Beazley</i> | <i>12 February</i> | <i>UK</i> | | Psalm 16,11 | <i>14 February</i> |
| <i>David, king of Israel</i> | <i>3-4, 10-11, 17-18, 24- 25. February</i> | <i>Israel</i> | | Psalm 54 | <i>3 February</i> |
| <i>Doris Kückmann</i> | <i>19-23 February</i> | <i>Canada/ Germany</i> | | Psalm 55 | <i>4 February</i> |
| <i>Dorothy Owen</i> | <i>15 February</i> | <i>Papua New- Guinea</i> | | Psalm 56 | <i>10 February</i> |
| <i>Eddie Askew +</i> | <i>6 February</i> | <i>UK</i> | | Psalm 57 | <i>11 February</i> |
| <i>Élie Fofolo</i> | <i>1 February</i> | <i>DR Congo</i> | | Psalm 58 | <i>17 February</i> |
| <i>Eric Chollet</i> | <i>8 February</i> | <i>Switzerland</i> | | Psalm 59 | <i>18 February</i> |
| <i>John Twynam-Perkins</i> | <i>5 February</i> | <i>Scotland</i> | | Psalm 60 | <i>24 February</i> |
| <i>June Nash +</i> | <i>9 February</i> | <i>UK</i> | | Psalm 61 | <i>25 February</i> |
| <i>Otto Kingsley</i> | <i>16 February</i> | <i>Southern Africa</i> | | Prov 13,18 | <i>1 February</i> |
| <i>Peter Laubscher</i> | <i>7 February</i> | <i>Southern Africa</i> | | Eccl 3,7 | <i>13 February</i> |
| <i>Raju PLN Dr</i> | <i>28 February</i> | <i>India</i> | | Habakkuk 3,17-19 | <i>26 and 27 February</i> |
| <i>Silvano Perotti</i> | <i>13 February</i> | | | Habakkuk 3,17-18 | <i>29 February</i> |
| <i>Trevor Durston</i> | <i>26-27 February</i> | <i>UK</i> | | Mark 14,37 | <i>6 February</i> |
| | | | | Luke 15,11-32 | <i>15 February</i> |
| | | | | Acts 9,1-19 | <i>19 February</i> |
| | | | | Romans 1,16-17 | <i>2 February</i> |
| | | | | Romans 5,5 | <i>22 February</i> |
| | | | | Romans 10,14- 15 | <i>5 February</i> |
| | | | | 1 Cor 1,30-31 | <i>23 February</i> |
| | | | | 1 Cor 1,4 | <i>21 February</i> |

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| | | | | 1 Cor 1,9 | 20 February |
| | | | | Philippians 1,21 | 19 February |
| | | | | Titus 1,1 | 28 February |

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