



TLM Daily Devotions

July 2018





Psalm 47

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

¹Clap your hands, all you nations;
shout to God with cries of joy.

²For the LORD Most High is awesome,
the great King over all the earth.

³He subdued nations under us,
peoples under our feet.

⁴He chose our inheritance for us,
the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.

⁵God has ascended amid shouts of joy,
the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.

⁶Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.

⁷For God is the King of all the earth;
sing to him a psalm of praise.

⁸God reigns over the nations;
God is seated on his holy throne.

⁹The nobles of the nations assemble
as the people of the God of Abraham,
for the kings^{of} of the earth belong to God;
he is greatly exalted.



The Speed of the Gospel

Mark 1.9-15

The Gospel according to Mark isn't very long, you can easily read it in a sitting and notice the speed of movement in it. Simon Reynolds book "Tell No-One, Preparing to Preach from Mark's Gospel" refers to it as the High Speed venture in Mark. Maybe we are too familiar with it that we don't notice the speed, often we read a story or a few verses and don't realise how dense and rich the text is. Here is an example, 7 verses from Chapter 1: *9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted, by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. 14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'*

The words I have underlined are all verbs. It is a passage full of action, Jesus, John the Baptist, the Spirit, the voice of God all active participants.

It starts with Jesus's Baptism, then the confirmation of who he is. Immediately he is forced into the wilderness before returning 40 days later to find John is in prison and he, Jesus launches into his ministry proclaiming the Kingdom of God is near. All that in just 7 verses.

In Mark's style of urgency, Jesus is straight way thrown out of his comfort zone the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. Is this a chance for him to consolidate his message? The word drove is a word only used by Mark in Greek is *ekballeo*, the other writers use a more gentle word *led*. *Ekballeo* has aggressive associations: and could be translated as 'thrown-out', 'evicted' 'banish', or even 'exclude.' Something that had happened to some Christians when the Gospel was written. Some were excluded from the Synagog, and in 70 c.e. many fled from Jerusalem. We can relate to this as we hear of the number of refugees rising world wide. Within our own lives, family or work people leave or are 'thrown out'. A sudden collapse of an enterprise leaving hundreds not knowing how they and their family will continue to live; family misunderstandings when contact is lost and one person feels banished.

Jesus returns from the wilderness and is met with the news John has been arrested and Jesus takes on his message and more. There is no time in this account for him to reflect on his time of being put to the test, and it seems a short time to face up to all the wild beasts that may emerge and threaten him on his journey from his Baptism to Easter. He is not alone the spirit had descended on him, and the voice you are my son

Neither are we alone When we are in the Wilderness periods in our lives, weather short or long knowing there is an after. We are not left driven out we are brought back.

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What do we do when it seems like our prayers are unanswered?

I don't know if you have ever had the experience of your prayers not being answered in the way you have expected or not even being answered? This has happened many times to me. When this happens, what are we to do? Here are a few thoughts of mine.

1. Guard your heart

Some wisdom from King Solomon *Proverbs 4:23-27* "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Our heart attitude plays a major role in all we do! *Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.*

The Bible also teaches us that: *Life & death are the power of the tongue* therefore we need to be careful of what we say before and after we have prayed! When you've prayed speak positive life producing words over what's been prayed. *Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you.*

Any tightrope walker will say "focus on a fixed, unmovable point" to stabilise your walk. Stay focused on Jesus the author & the finisher of your faith.

Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil."

Measure what you do, what you allow yourself to listen too, get your confirmation and direction from the unfailing Word of God, The Bible?

2. What you're going through will not last forever

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Did I hear someone say: What, Never? Where you are now someone has been before!

Hebrews 12:1-3 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

3. You have a Heavenly Father who will not abandon you!

Isaiah 40:25-26, 29-31 "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Has life grounded you?

- Attitude determines altitude!
- We need to be more convinced of the beauty of tomorrow than the difficulty of today.
 - Pray without ceasing!

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.



You Were Called to be Free

Read Galatians 5:13-15, 22-25

The Bible talks a great deal about the Shepherd and the sheep but, at least in Scotland, where you see a shepherd and sheep you also see a third “person” a beautiful Border Collie dog. I once had such a dog but sadly she seemed to be frightened of sheep. She could deal with any other farm animal – cows, hens, pigs but not sheep.

However, the story I want to recall is about another border collie called Lass. A farmer had decided to buy some sheep and was wondering where he could get a good sheep dog that he could bring on to his farm. His attention was drawn to an advert in the paper: “Wanted: a good country home for pure bred Border Collie. Chases cars and bicycles”. On phoning the lady owner of the dog he was told “Please do come quickly, no one else wants her”. When the man went to see the lady and the dog, she told him “I can’t do a thing with this creature. The dog is just crazy.”

The dog went to the farm with the man and became a one man dog- like his shadow she went everywhere he went. She wanted the man in full view all the time. More than that she, fulfilled the precise purpose for which she had been brought into being she was the perfect sheep dog. She was able to herd sheep and stopped trying to herd cars and bicycles. Fulfilling her purpose she revelled in that life with abundant energy and enthusiasm.

I am sure you can think of many parallels to this true story.

Are we fulfilling the life for which God created us – He has a purpose for each one of us and for that purpose He created us. Are we keeping God in full view as we live our lives – otherwise how can we understand and obey His commands, His instructions and His guidance? Are we too busy criticising others, to busy trying to sort everyone else out to see the need God sees, or to see the way He is pointing out to us?

Today as you live your life and carry out your tasks however, great or small, keep God in full view that you might be seeking and fulfilling His command. I was encouraged to write this particular thought by something that happened to me yesterday. I was on my way to a meeting of our ladies group in church – in the summer months we don’t have a formal meeting but continue to meet for “Tea and Chat”. I was quite early and had gone to do some errands on the Main Street when I suddenly felt that I had to go to the hall. Outside I met a lady walking up and down – “I wasn’t sure if I was in the right place and didn’t want to ring the bell on my own”. I was able to assure her and indeed to go in and sit with her – she had not been to the group for a while and just needed that little encouragement to join in again. A small task, nothing hard to do but what an encouragement that afternoon was for that lady.

Today “fix your eyes on Jesus” (we used to sing that in a chorus in Sunday School), keep God in full view.



Christian Living - Old Self to New Self - 1

Ephesians 4:17-32

Christians are in this world but not of the world (John 17:16) and are only passing through it according to the will and plan of God. Christians must not walk, talk, nor act like unsaved (Gentiles) people!!! But the first flush of joy of experiencing the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ is not easily sustained. It has many challenges.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor. An important political, educational and commercial centre ("Supreme Metropolis of Asia"). Historically, it had the temple of Diana, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It had a fledgling church begun among the Gentiles by Paul during his third missionary journey. It was plagued by "fables and endless genealogies" and disputes than works for God's glory (1 Timothy 1:4). They have lost sight of Christ as the Head and the Holy Spirit is the lifeblood (Revelation 2:1-7). This is true of many Christians and Churches; then and now.

Paul wrote a letter of encouragement to the Church at Ephesus to remain in unity and attain fullness of Christ. He defines the transition from the Old Self to the New Self and its manifestation.

V 17-19: The Old Self (Flesh)

This is the self which is alienated from God. It is spiritually blind, hardened at heart and given to sensuality. It is impure. It is selfish; driven by personal gain and greed. It puts itself ahead of others. It lives to gratify its own desires rather than God's desires. It remains in the dark. In effect man makes himself as an idol and worship it, self-justified by convoluted arguments.

V 20-24: The means for change (Jesus)

God has provided the means for change. In Jesus, I can make a break from the old self to the new self. He is the bridge to cross over to true likeness of God's righteousness and holiness. He is the Truth of Salvation. Knowledge of this leads to fullness of truth about God, man, creation, history, life, purpose, relationships, heaven, hell, judgment and everything else that is important to life here in this world and in eternity. Change in our mental attitude is needed to receive Jesus. Mind is the centre of thought, motives and actions (Colossians 3:2).

In gratitude for His grace.



Christian Living - Old Self to New Self - 2

The New Self (Righteous & Holiness in Christ)

Ephesians 4, 25-32

The new self is acquired through salvation (2Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"). New behavioural traits to bring glory to God and edify His people. The saving grace must be evident to the unbelievers. Good works are out of gratitude for grace of salvation given through Jesus. Christian behaviour is Gospel on feet. It helps a believer to remain and grow in faith in Jesus.

- **V 25. *Speak the truth*** fearlessly in love. Reality challenges and awakens. Jesus is the Truth.
- **V 26-27. *In anger don't sin***. The emphasis is on not sinning in anger. Sinful anger gives the foothold to devil. Anger is good or bad depending on the motive and purpose. Righteous anger corrects behaviour. It's directed at evil and not the person. Righteous anger can also turn into bitterness, so act on it promptly.
- **V 28. *Don't steal*** but work honestly. Not contributing to furthering God's kingdom is stealing. Stop being a taker and be a giver of knowledge, skills, talents, time and money to the Church. Move from selfishness to sharing. Be a blessing. Help others in need.
- **V 29. *Don't speak unwholesome words***. Derogatory words harm relationships. Speak the words to grow (edify, build) people. Do not utter words whose purpose is to wound and not to heal. Christian speech should be instructive, encouraging, uplifting (even it is corrective), appropriate (for the context) and gracious.
- **V 30. *Don't grieve the Holy Spirit*** by ignoring His promptings and guidance. The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of eternal redemption in Christ for those who believe in Him. He is hurt when we sin against each other by condemning, judging, gossiping (2 Timothy 2:16 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly). He is grieved when His children refuse to let go the old ways of flesh/sin to the righteous ways of new life, even after confessing Jesus as their personal saviour. Our motive should be please God and not grieve Him.
- **V 31. *Get rid of all bitterness*** (smouldering resentment), rage and anger (deep hostility), brawling (cry of strife out of control) and slander (evil speaking), along with every form of malice. Cleanse oneself. Detox.
- **V 32. *Be kind, compassionate and forgive*** as you were forgiven by Christ. It is not an option. Its mandatory. In forgiving one gets released from the burden of anger and disappointments.

Significance

We must meditate on the truths of God's Word until our outlook, feelings, sentiments, and dispositions have been renewed to God's way of thinking and doing. Change of heart. The key is conviction by indwelling person of the Holy Spirit. If we don't have the Spirit of Christ in our soul, we do not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9). A Christian must manifest in his/her living Jesus Christ for the expansion of God's Kingdom on this earth.

In gratitude for His grace.



Psalm 48

A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah.

¹Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise,
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

²Beautiful in its loftiness,
the joy of the whole earth,
like the heights of Zaphon[Ⓜ] is Mount Zion,
the city of the Great King.

³God is in her citadels;
he has shown himself to be her fortress.

⁴When the kings joined forces,
when they advanced together,
⁵they saw her and were astounded;
they fled in terror.

⁶Trembling seized them there,
pain like that of a woman in labor.

⁷You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish
shattered by an east wind.

⁸As we have heard, so we have seen
in the city of the LORD Almighty,
in the city of our God:
God makes her secure forever.

⁹Within your temple, O God,
we meditate on your unfailing love.

¹⁰Like your name, O God,
your praise reaches to the ends of the earth;
your right hand is filled with righteousness.

¹¹Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad
because of your judgments.

¹²Walk about Zion, go around her count her towers,

¹³consider well her ramparts,
view her citadels,
that you may tell of them
to the next generation.

¹⁴For this God is our God for ever and ever;
he will be our guide even to the end.



Psalm 49

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

¹Hear this, all you peoples;
listen, all who live in this world,
²both low and high,
rich and poor alike:
³My mouth will speak words of wisdom;
the meditation of my heart will give you understanding.
⁴I will turn my ear to a proverb;
with the harp I will expound my riddle:
⁵Why should I fear when evil days come,
when wicked deceivers surround me—
⁶those who trust in their wealth
and boast of their great riches?
⁷No one can redeem the life of another
or give to God a ransom for them—
⁸the ransom for a life is costly,
no payment is ever enough—
⁹so that they should live on forever
and not see decay.
¹⁰For all can see that the wise die,
that the foolish and the senseless also perish,
leaving their wealth to others.
¹¹Their tombs will remain their houses[Ⓜ] forever,
their dwellings for endless generations,
though they had[Ⓜ] named lands after themselves.
¹²People, despite their wealth, do not endure;
they are like the beasts that perish.
¹³This is the fate of those who trust in themselves,
and of their followers, who approve their sayings.[Ⓜ]
¹⁴They are like sheep and are destined to die;
death will be their shepherd
(but the upright will prevail over them in the morning).
Their forms will decay in the grave,

far from their princely mansions.

¹⁵But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead;
he will surely take me to himself.

¹⁶Do not be overawed when others grow rich,
when the splendor of their houses increases;

¹⁷for they will take nothing with them when they die,
their splendor will not descend with them.

¹⁸Though while they live they count themselves blessed—
and people praise you when you prosper—

¹⁹they will join those who have gone before them,
who will never again see the light of life.

²⁰People who have wealth but lack understanding
are like the beasts that perish.



"Reflection"

"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" John 14:9

Recently I was walking in the Swiss alps with some of my grandchildren. It was a perfect day. Warm enough to be comfortable. The few light clouds blended with the deep blue sky to create beautiful patterns.

Near the top of a mountain pass there is a charming little lake. The water is crystal clear and you can observe the fish swimming metres below the surface. We decided to take a footpath that goes around the lake.

At one spot there is a small clearing. The scent of pines and wild flowers, the stillness broken by the occasional chirping of birds - peace. The mountains form an amphitheatre jutting majestically into the sky. A forest of pines followed by a strip of flowering bushesfollowed by mountain grasses, then barren rock becoming snow-covered as the peaks mingle with the sun, clouds and sky. Sheer beauty.

I looked up in awe at the scene until my neck started aching then I noticed that one of the grandchildren was not looking with us. "Aren't you interested in the view?" "Yes, I am, but I can see it all here." I walked to the spot where she was standing next to the water. Sure enough she was right. The lake was totally calm and the whole picture was reflected in every detail right at our feet.

As a young man, I often wondered what God was like, was it possible to see Him, was He interested in me? Then I met Jesus and through Him I am discovering each day new aspects of the Father's love and beauty.

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." Colossians 2:9

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.



How Jesus wants, the family to be – Part 1

The news reaches from Bethany to Jesus that his friend Lazarus, to whom he loved very much is sick. His first reaction was that this sickness is not of death. He stayed for another two days in this place with his disciples, even after hearing the news of sickness. He showed no hurry to visit this family at their grief. This seems little strange to us in first reading of the passage. Later on Jesus told his disciples that Lazarus is sleeping, which he confirmed that Lazarus is dead. The entire incidents of the relationship of Jesus with this family are mentioned in N.T. three times.

1st *Luke 10(38 -42)*

2nd *John 11(1- 44)*

3rd *John 12 (1- 3)*

Jesus loved this family of two sisters, Mary & Martha and the brother, Lazarus. Jesus used to visit them frequently with his disciples and they used to have meals together. We know that Martha complained to Jesus that she has to do all the cooking and washing work in the kitchen and Mary does not to help her in this work. Martha asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her in the kitchen. Jesus replied to Martha, you are always worried on worldly affairs but the particular position, which has been given to Mary, will not be taken away from her.

Jesus loved this family very much but he was very sad, probably hurt seeing that there was no proper understanding, concern for each other and harmony among two sisters. The personality of Lazarus was also not making positive contribution in this.

1. Martha was doing all the work in the kitchen but always complaining. She was busy in worldly matters & affairs.
2. Mary was not helping at all to her sister in this work. It seems she was little selfish and wanted to take best position easily. She never took initiative or made arrangements of food earlier with Martha, so Martha could also have time to listen to the words of Jesus.
3. It seems that the brother, Lazarus was never at home when Jesus visited them with disciples. He was also not helping in the house work.

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How Jesus wants, the family to be – Part 2

After the death of Lazarus:

Martha complained again to Jesus on his arrival to Bethany, when he was still outside and had not reached to their home. She said, if you were here, my brother would have not died. Here in this passage the dialogues between Jesus and Martha are really strong and meaningful.

Jesus said.....*I am the life and resurrection.* Martha replied.....*Yes Lord; I believe that you are son of God.* We are encouraged here by the great witness of Martha. Even though she was always busy in kitchen work and had no opportunity like Mary to sit and listen to words of Jesus but her faith on Jesus was very strong. Not many people close to Jesus at that time believed like that and said to Jesus. Only three persons in NT- Peter, Martha and Nathaniel have said this great word (You are son of God) to Jesus.

We also see in this chapter that Jesus weeps at the death of Lazarus. Jesus has wept only two times in NT- 1. Time of Lazarus's death 2. Seeing the condition of the temple, after entering Jerusalem.

It looks like that Jesus wanted this family to have some sad experience, to bring transformation in the attitude and behavior of the family members. Jesus loved this family very much and wanted positive change among the members, so that they could live in harmony and have concern for each other.

Happy ending:

We see at the third visits of Jesus to their house just before the Passover, that all (Mary, Martha, Lazarus and Jesus & His disciples) are there and having meal together. No family member was making complains any more.

Jesus wants our family to be like this.

We must have love, care, concern for each other and good harmony & understanding among the family members.

Pradeep & Sarah Failbus Worked for 39 years and 29 years with TLM(most at Anandaban, Nepal) Now retired and settled at: Kathgodam, District Nainital Uttarakhand, India M – 8853551227



Cracked and broken vessels

2 Corinthians 4:1-7

In January 1982 we arrived in Kathmandu at the start of our time with the United Mission to Nepal. One of my first impressions was the curious local shops with open fronts selling many different kinds of goods. One which especially caught our attention was the pottery shop with a display of bright orange simply fired but unglazed clay pots in all shapes and sizes.

It took a while before we started to understand how these pots were used – some for storing water, others for storing grain etc. But then there were always plenty of very small vessels not much bigger than a cricket ball with a kind of knob on the top (many reading this will know exactly what I mean!). They were pots alright, but sealed at the top – then with a slot cut in the side. I still have one!

They are of course pots to keep money in – a simple way of saving. And because they are sealed you can't get the money out unless you break the pot. That may seem a waste, but these pots were cheap – they only cost one Rupee at a time that a cup of tea cost two Rupees. These cheap rough pots were thrown together quickly. Many had cracked a bit in the firing, but still holding together to serve their purpose.

But this rough cracked exterior hid the contents well because when in use, these pots contained money – in as sense they held treasure!

What a lovely illustration for this passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul was totally bowled over by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and what he has done to save those who put their trust in him. He sees this Gospel as great treasure – just as in the parable of the buried treasure that Jesus himself told. And he wants everybody to know about this treasure and to experience it for themselves.

But he's also aware of our human frailty. Later in this letter he writes of his own *"thorn in the flesh"* which was ever present. Paul, was like a cracked pot – and we are too when we're honest with ourselves. But what treasure lies within – the *"light that shines out of darkness,"* and *"the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."*

And one interesting thing – to get to the money in the clay pots, they have to be broken open. Sometimes we also discover that it's in the most broken experiences of life that the light of Jesus really shines out.

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



Sources of Value: Psalm 1: Making valuable choices in Life

Please read and contemplate on Psalm 1

Sources of value can be very diverse: They can be people, words, images, music, nature or other. From these sources of value you can find orientation and direction in life and derive life energy. Cultivation contact with these sources of value offers a broadening of horizon and creates the conditions for growth and maturity.

The above is strikingly expressed in this Psalm. Here is a blessed man who has made choices and is making choices on the way every day. Each of them can be either fruitful or lead to nothing. Psalm 1 uses the metaphor of steps, choosing the right way, not walking in the counsel of the wicked, not standing in the way of sinners; the Lord watches over the way of the righteous; the way of the wicket will perish. How do you find your direction? Which roads do you choose to take?

For a people familiar with the desert, orientation is of vital importance. Will you reach your destination, or will you lose your way and perish? For our orientation in life and work the same thing applies: there are sources of value that give us orientation and there are directions that are worthless. It is essential to look for these sources of value, to distinguish them from what is worthless. To connect to them in order to have life and bear fruit. Not only for the major life decisions (which is also true!), but for the many small choices you make every day, and which can inject value or non-value, balm or poison into the causal network of your life. Some small examples: do you give attention to someone or don't you have time? Do you give someone space in traffic, or are you closing the gaps? Do you listen to fifteen minutes of beautiful music at the end of the day or do you soullessly check some worthless tv channels or Apps? Do you give positive or negative feedback in a staff discussion?

In this Psalm, the sources of injustice are always people: the wicked, the sinners, the mockers. They seek out each other (counsel and circle). It can be tempting to be part of this. But the sources of value are also persons and are ultimately connected to a Person. Will you choose the law of the Lord, not as a legal code, but as a route sign and guide line? The law offers orientation by which you and the ones connected to you can thrive and prosper. Choosing what is valuable is not so much being well-behaved and sticking to the rules, but this text teaches that it is about fertility that occurs when you stretch your roots to sources where streams of water flow.

Stretching to running water is a necessary prerequisite for fertility, but no guarantee for immediate growth and flowering. Fruit comes in season, or as stated elsewhere ... 'in His time'. This requires patience. It can be far away. What happens if you do not remain connected to sources of value? Then you will see no growth and bloom, and then you end up like the chaff that the wind blows away.

The final verse shows that it is not about external reward or punishment, but about intrinsic fertility or the lack of it. We have to choose for ourselves, constantly, orienting ourselves on the sources of value that others offer. It is your own way that will either bear fruit or will only stir up some chaff. Not out of good faith or conformism, but because we ourselves thrive better. Blessed is the man (or woman)!

Contemplate today what could be your sources of value to make you prosper and bear fruit.

Adapted from a Dutch book on Benedictine spirituality in daily life, written by Wil Derkse

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Psalm 50

A psalm of Asaph.

¹The Mighty One, God, the LORD,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to where it sets.
²From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth.
³Our God comes
and will not be silent;
a fire devours before him,
and around him a tempest rages.
⁴He summons the heavens above,
and the earth, that he may judge his people:
⁵“Gather to me this consecrated people,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”
⁶And the heavens proclaim his righteousness,
for he is a God of justice.^{(a)(b)}
⁷“Listen, my people, and I will speak;
I will testify against you, Israel:
I am God, your God.
⁸I bring no charges against you concerning your sacrifices
or concerning your burnt offerings, which are ever before me.
⁹I have no need of a bull from your stall
or of goats from your pens,
¹⁰for every animal of the forest is mine,
and the cattle on a thousand hills.
¹¹I know every bird in the mountains,
and the insects in the fields are mine.
¹²If I were hungry I would not tell you,
for the world is mine, and all that is in it.
¹³Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?
¹⁴“Sacrifice thank offerings to God,
fulfill your vows to the Most High,

¹⁵and call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

¹⁶But to the wicked person, God says:

“What right have you to recite my laws
or take my covenant on your lips?

¹⁷You hate my instruction
and cast my words behind you.

¹⁸When you see a thief, you join with him;
you throw in your lot with adulterers.

¹⁹You use your mouth for evil
and harness your tongue to deceit.

²⁰You sit and testify against your brother
and slander your own mother’s son.

²¹When you did these things and I kept silent,
you thought I was exactly^d like you.

But I now arraign you
and set my accusations before you.

²²“Consider this, you who forget God,
or I will tear you to pieces, with no one to rescue you:

²³Those who sacrifice thank offerings honor me,
and to the blameless^d I will show my salvation.”



Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

²Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

⁵Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁶Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

¹⁵Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹⁷My sacrifice, O God, is^{bl} a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

¹⁸May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.



The Prophet Ezekiel – Priest without a Temple – 1.

Read: 2 Kings 24:8-17, Ezekiel 1:1-3

Ezekiel was far from home. As the crow flies 1250 km, by road at least 1500 km. It felt like the end of the world, the end of hope. He probably had to walk there in forced marches of 50 kilometres a day in the scorching sun and in a state of general neglect. Many had not made it – a number of friends and loved ones had died on the way. And here they were, in Tel Abib (3:15)¹, in some sort of refugee camp. There was water, they could cultivate food. But otherwise? What were they supposed to do here?

Growing up

At home Ezekiel had been a well-educated young man. He was being prepared for the priesthood and could read the holy scrolls. He knew large parts of them by heart. He learned how to interpret the texts and so learned the rules that governed his life. He knew all the rituals and how to conduct them and how to choose the appropriate ritual for each occasion. He learned to distinguish between clean and unclean and how to resolve situations where doubts or questions arose about this.

He learned how to apply the law when conflicts arose in the community. His education gave him a clear vision for a pure and undefiled worship of the one God. He listened to discussions among his uncles about national politics and he came to understand international relations as well. He had no difficulty explaining why they were going in exile now. But that did not make it any more pleasant.

Lost Ideals

Twenty five Ezekiel was when king Jehoiachin surrendered Jerusalem once again to Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kon.24:10-12)² and submitted to him³. Up to that point his career had been cut out for him. He was going to be ordained a priest at the age of thirty (Num 4). He would be given a role in the temple. He would conduct worship and act as a councillor to the people. Through sacrifice he could bring people back to a right relationship with God and give them a new beginning. He would teach them how to live according to God's rules. He would use his influence at the court to push back idolatry and immorality. He would pray for peace and work for social justice.

Nothing was left of those ideals. Never again would Ezekiel bring a sacrifice in the temple of the Lord. Never again would he experience the peace and joy of the purification offering. He would not be able to continue the work that his whole family had been doing for centuries. It was a question that occupied Ezekiel's mind day and night: How can I be a priest without a temple?

To reflect

Ezekiel was a man whose life never turned out as he had wanted. He shared intensely in the experience of trauma imposed upon his people. With them, he was uprooted, deported, robbed of his dignity and his dreams for the future. Many refugees today have similar experiences. Similarly, although the dynamics are different, the diagnosis of Leprosy can turn a person's life completely upside down. What encouragement can we offer in such situations?

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¹ The city of Tel Aviv preserves this same name to this day.

² This had happened seven years earlier as well; cf. Daniel 1:1-2, 2 Kings 23:36.

³ Cf. 1:1-2; It is generally accepted that the thirtieth year in 1:1 refers to Ezekiel's age.



The Prophet Ezekiel – Priest without a Temple – 2.

Read: Ezekiel 11:1-13

Ezekiel saw all he had been proud of collapse - his city, his country, his temple. This provoked strong emotions of unbelief, anger, grief and rebellion. He deeply felt the shame and disgrace of seeing his nation humiliated and reduced to a country like any other. For it was not just his own country that was collapsing. The whole region was swept away: Powerful Tyrus (26-28), Sidon (28:20-26), Ammon (25:1-7), Moab (25:8-11), Edom (25:12-14), Philistea (25:15-17), Egypt (29-32)... One by one all those kingdoms collapsed. Nothing remained in place and none were secure. And in that chaos, in all the suffering, in all the upheaval and devastation that resulted, Ezekiel could not help asking tough questions about God's role in all of this and how to understand this situation in the light of his Word. They were questions almost too big to ask, let alone answer. Ezekiel's identity had been shaped by the reality of a God who was in complete control. And that same God now let him end up on a dusty plain (19:13) in a shackle made of sun-baked blocks of clay where any hope of ever seeing the temple again was relentlessly taken away from him.

No integration

We see in Ezekiel no inclination whatsoever to integrate in the new society in which he involuntarily found himself. All his attention is for the community of Judeans around him and for Jerusalem and developments there. We read about messengers who travel back and forth between Jerusalem and Tel Abib (21:7, 24:26, 33:21 Jer.29:3). We read in Jeremiah about exchanges of letters between the elders in the two communities (Jer 29:1,24,31). We read how Ezekiel expresses strong opinions about the situation back home (Ez.11, 17, 34) and how in a vision he sees all that is going wrong in Jerusalem (Ez.8, 11). His attitude reminds us of what we sometimes see among refugee communities in Europe that use their freedom to try and influence the situation in their home country.

Leadership

Although Ezekiel struggles with his identity as a priest, the people around him still see him as a spiritual leader. They come to him to seek his council (8:1, 14:1, 20:1); they inquire of him about the will of God; he teaches them (24:18). At age thirty Ezekiel is not ordained as a priest with the appropriate rituals and robes. Instead, Ezekiel is called by God himself through a vision so overwhelming that he is in shock for seven days, after which he spends seven years acting upon it with all that he is and all that he has. Then all that Ezekiel has predicted becomes terrible reality: Jerusalem falls and the temple is destroyed (33:21). From that moment on Ezekiel works for another fifteen years (29:17) for the re-launch of the failed project that his people effectively has become. From that moment on where all seems lost, Ezekiel begins to speak of return – the theme that dominates the thoughts of every refugee and every exile. A vision grows within him for the reconstruction of his country, its spatial planning, its temple and its central institutions (40-48).

Conclusion

Ezekiel's concern is for his exile community and how he can help them to make sense of the atrocities they are witnessing. His concern is for their identity as the people of God. Ultimately, Ezekiel's concern is for God himself.

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The Prophet Ezekiel – Priest without a Temple – 3.

Read: Ezekiel 18: 19-24, 30-32

Changed social relations

When the king of Babylon selected people for deportation, he paid particular attention to their capacities (cf. Jer 29:1-2, 2 Ki 24:14-16). People with political power had been taken into custody (elders, court officials, leaders), people with military power (officers and fighting men), and those who could play a role in the weapon industry (craftsmen and smiths). Priests and prophets were also taken away, including Ezekiel and his wife. They had to leave all behind and build a new life in Babylon from scratch. A new community developed, a mini-society in which everyone used his and her gifts and talents to scrape out a living. Now no-one was rich or powerful any longer. Now people who had been used to work with their hands had better chances than people who had earned their income through position or education.

In the new situation the social relations of home no longer applied. Back home your position was determined by the family you belonged to, the land you owned or the functions you performed at the court. In the new situation this was not so important anymore. What counted now was the ability to sustain yourself. Part of that was the ability to relate to the new society around you. That meant learning the language, participating in the economy – trading, working as a day labourer or even begging. It also meant having an open eye for the opportunities that this society offered. It is likely that the more enterprising exiles quickly found their way into Babylonian society and were absorbed into it. They gave up their Jewish identity and successfully integrated into the host culture adopting new norms and values and abandoning the worship of the God of Israel⁴.

Against this backdrop of eroding identity, it is understandable that Ezekiel strongly emphasizes the importance and value of each individual's choice to serve God (Eze.3:17-21, 18:30-32, 33:11-16) and to live in accordance with his instructions.

To reflect

In traditional societies, a whole family is judged for the sins of one its members. Ezekiel says that when such a society falls apart, the future is for those who choose to respond to God and obey his commands. How do we respond when the society and the circumstances of our lives are drastically change?

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⁴ We know that later a flourishing Jewish community developed in Babylon. That first wave of deportations, however, brought primarily loss of social status and possibly forced labour (cf. Ahn, J. 'Exile'. in: M.J. Boda, J.G. McConville (Editors). Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets. IVP 2012).



The Prophet Ezekiel – Priest without a Temple – 4.

Read: Jeremiah 29: 1-14 While some Jewish exiles left their old realities behind and immersed themselves into the culture of their host country, others continued to define themselves according to who they were in their country of origin. They still had relatives back home and many possessed land, houses and businesses. They eagerly followed international political developments, searching for even the slightest glimmer of hope that a return would become possible again. We, who know how their story unfolded later, can be surprised about the optimism many still entertained. There were prophets who said that it would only take a year or two (Jer 28:1-4,11). Many said: God will certainly preserve his temple - therefore, Jerusalem will soon be liberated and we will be able to return again. Let's hold on a little longer, let's absorb our present misery for now. Soon we will be able to continue where we left off and live our lives as before.

Because of this perception, the letter that Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon was not well received. Jeremiah let them know in no uncertain terms that they should not expect to return anytime soon. In fact, he said that none of those early exiles would ever come back. The mention of seventy years suggested that only their grandchildren would be able to return. It is a very tough message and immediately strings are pulled to suppress it (Jer 29:25-28). Local prophets are encouraged to speak out in far more optimistic tones (Jer 29:8). In this context, the message of Ezekiel is in line with that of Jeremiah. Ezekiel directly opposes public opinion and unmasks it as an illusion and a lack of understanding of the ways of God. His message during those first seven years is: Things will get even worse! Jerusalem will fall, the city will be destroyed (e.g. Eze.3, 6, 11, 12, 17, 21). Ezekiel speaks about the vision in which he has seen how God's glory has left the temple in Jerusalem (Eze 10) demonstrating that God had abandoned his temple to destruction.

In chapter 1, however, Ezekiel had seen the glory of the Lord appear in the plain near Tel Abib. Clearly then, God wanted to be present with those 'written off' exiles in Babylon and remain faithful to them right through this time of judgment. God showed Ezekiel that, even without a temple, He is present with him and can be found by those who seek him.

Whilst the exiles were relying on the stability of their country of origin, Ezekiel foresaw that the point of gravity for the Jewish people would soon be in Babylon, not in Jerusalem. Eventually the exiles would give continuity to the Jewish identity and not the people who had stayed behind in Judea.

To reflect

God's message to his people was not what they would like it to be. The truth He revealed to them was harsh and painful. But the Lord wanted them to stare reality in the face so that they could adjust to it and cope. God's speaking to them in this way is an expression of his care for them and his resolve to carry them through these very difficult circumstances.

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The Prophet Ezekiel – Priest without a Temple – 5.

Read: Ezekiel 36: 16-28

The exiles felt that God had forgotten them (12:22, 27). They thought the sins of their ancestors were the cause of this (18:2). Ezekiel, however, spares no effort to convince people that it is possible to serve the God of Israel here in Babylon; that that choice, right through all the suffering his listeners go through, is the only one that offers a perspective on the future. In some sense, the idea that God had forgotten them was less painful than the alternative, namely that God had consciously turned against them and had chosen to destroy their lives and their society.

That is why Ezekiel has no alternative but to speak about the sins of his people and the righteousness of God in his judgments. Ezekiel refers to the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, the texts of the covenant, and shows them that God is justified in his judgment. He shows how God has been dishonoured by the behaviour of his people and that therefore He had no choice but to intervene. Again and again (over 70 times!) Ezekiel repeats his refrain: “You will know that I am the Lord”. Ezekiel shows that, although God has been infinitely patient with his people, his patience cannot be tested and abused indefinitely. He wants his own people to see this, but also the nations around them.

Ezekiel insists that although the world is in chaos, a pattern can be discovered in the course of events, that a consistent course is being followed. And when he follows that course through, Ezekiel sees its logical consequence as an eventual return and renewal of the Jewish people. After Jerusalem has fallen and the temple has been destroyed, after all this humiliation and shame (36:1-5 cf. Jer.29:18), God’s nature will be best revealed through the seemingly impossible restoration of his people. It will be a demonstration of the fundamental goodness and faithfulness of God (36:20-23). Ezekiel foresees that God will seek a solution for the apostasy and misconduct of his people. A purification is needed which will be so pervasive and so transformative that his people will learn to follow his instructions from their hearts (20:43, 36:24-28).

In this way, Ezekiel formulates his own unique analysis of events, rooted in his priestly tradition and in the scriptures to which he had access. He works for the preservation of the Jewish identity and does not shy away from speaking about judgment where that is necessary. He continues to seek after the one God in a context that mitigates against this at every level. And God blesses him with words of hope and the perspective of a better future.

To reflect

Do we call out to God in the difficult realities of our lives for purification and renewal? Do we acknowledge that God is right, even if He sometimes allows us to be humiliated? Can we hope for a brighter future in spite of a demoralizing present?

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Psalm 52

For the director of music. A maskil of David. When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: "David has gone to the house of Ahimelek."

¹Why do you boast of evil, you mighty hero?

Why do you boast all day long,
you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?

²You who practice deceit,
your tongue plots destruction;
it is like a sharpened razor.

³You love evil rather than good,
falsehood rather than speaking the truth.^(a)

⁴You love every harmful word,
you deceitful tongue!

⁵Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin:
He will snatch you up and pluck you from your tent;
he will uproot you from the land of the living.

⁶The righteous will see and fear;
they will laugh at you, saying,

⁷"Here now is the man
who did not make God his stronghold
but trusted in his great wealth
and grew strong by destroying others!"

⁸But I am like an olive tree
flourishing in the house of God;
I trust in God's unfailing love
for ever and ever.

⁹For what you have done I will always praise you
in the presence of your faithful people.

And I will hope in your name,
for your name is good.



Psalm 53

For the director of music. According to mahalath. A maskil of David.

¹The fool says in his heart,
“There is no God.”

They are corrupt, and their ways are vile;
there is no one who does good.

²God looks down from heaven
on all mankind

to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.

³Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.

⁴Do all these evildoers know nothing?
They devour my people as though eating bread;
they never call on God.

⁵But there they are, overwhelmed with dread,
where there was nothing to dread.
God scattered the bones of those who attacked you;
you put them to shame, for God despised them.

⁶Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!
When God restores his people,
let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!



The Prophet Ezekiel – Priest without a Temple – 6.

Read: Ezekiel 4: 1-15

Ezekiel's trauma

Ezekiel was a strange man. Some people gossiped about a great deal. In the small community of Tel Abib, where everyone knew each other, Ezekiel frequently was the talk of the town. What to think of a man who lies down on the ground in his yard for more than a year (4:5-6)? Who plays out the siege of Jerusalem like some sort of Lego game (4:1-3)? Who breaks down the wall of his own house (12:5)? Who shocks people by his explicit language (e.g. 16:25-26, 36)? Who suddenly is seen wielding a sword (5:2)? Who speaks about events he cannot possibly know anything about (11:13)? Who claims to see things way beyond the imagination of any ordinary human being (1:1-3:15)? Who is frequently heard singing dirges, songs of mourning (19:14, 27:2, 28:12, 32:2), but then refuses to mourn when his wife passes away (24:15-18)? The thought that Ezekiel is somehow not quite right in the head is never far. Mental health professionals can certainly provide some suitable labels. In the course of the past one hundred years, diagnoses have been suggested ranging from schizophrenia to epilepsy to post-traumatic stress disorder⁵. These ideas are reinforced by the mysterious inability of the prophet to speak ('I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth...' 3:26) and by Ezekiel's perception that he was lying on the ground 'tied down by ropes' (3:25, 4:8).

Opinions about this vary. Many would rather not face up to such a possibility. Ezekiel is a prophet of God and so he had to be mentally healthy. How else could he speak the words of God? Others would say that there was, indeed, a severe trauma in the life of Ezekiel and in the consciousness of the Jewish community he served. For them Ezekiel's behaviour reflects his despondency because no words could adequately express what had happened. From a modern, Western viewpoint we are inclined to see psychopathology where the exiles saw a man who used strong language and had episodes of extreme behaviour but not necessarily someone who was ill. Ezekiel was respected as someone who spoke of God. History shows that the Jewish community has eventually recognised in Ezekiel's ministry the message of God and has preserved and transmitted his writings as the Word of God.

To reflect

Apparently it was possible for Ezekiel to be broken, marked by the effects of suffering, someone who deeply felt the shame brought upon his people, while at the same time being a man who heard the voice of God, saw the glory of God and was used by the Spirit of God to say what was needed to connect his people with God and give direction throughout these years of deep crisis. Does this biblical evidence challenge the way we view people with mental health problems?

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⁵ C.C.H. Cook, 'Psychiatry in scripture: sacred texts and psychopathology.' *The psychiatrist*, 36/6 (2012). p. 225-229.



Tell me more

“The definition of faith is a man who buys hair restorer from a bald barber.” Indeed. And sadly, there is no barber, bald or otherwise, who has a potion powerful enough to restore my long-lost locks. While I’m about it, I do think the barber should charge me half price for cutting my hair, don’t you? After all, there’s so little for him to do.

I got to thinking about the bald barber a few days ago during Sunday morning worship. The singing was dire. The congregation looked bored and miserable in equal measure. I’m not one for being all smiles all the time, but seriously, this is how we look when we’re singing about sins forgiven and the hope of heaven? What would we look like if we were told that our debts had been reinstated?

We really did seem to be like a gathering of bald barbers, offering people joy but exuding woe. I wondered what would have happened if a stranger had stumbled into our midst - I can’t imagine them exclaiming “Wow, these people really have something, and I want it too!”

Which brings me to *Luke chapter 16*, which is so often misleadingly headed in English translations as the “Parable of the dishonest manager.” The story develops in the *first seven verses* – the manager has been reported to be wasting his master’s assets and is about to lose his position, so he calls his master’s debtors and tells them to enter hugely reduced balances against their names in the debtors’ ledger. In verse eight, the story takes an odd twist. Without any explanation as to how he found out about this scheme, the master commends the manager for his shrewdness. Well, he found out the moment the manager set the debit forgiveness scheme in motion. The villagers assumed that the manager was still in the employ of the master and so assumed that the forgiveness of their debts had happened at the instigation of the master. Did they thank the manager? Probably not [it wasn’t his money, after all], but they would have started a party to end all parties that night and probably took their celebrations down to the master’s house, where he would have been awakened by their boisterous celebrations. Imagine his surprise when he found that he was the object of their adulation. What now? Does he stop the celebrations and reveal all and send the celebrants home devastated and smitten with grief? I think that at this point the shrewdness to which the master alludes is revealed. There is nothing shrewd about forgiving debts – of course people are going to be happy – the manager’s shrewdness stemmed rather from a lifetime of observing his master. He had an inkling as to how the master would respond in this situation. He staked his future not on the behaviour of the debtors but on the behaviour of the Creditor. He had brought shame on the master by behaving badly and now he had to restore the honour of the master [the master was not upset about the loss of some of his assets – he was extremely rich – he was rather distressed about having been made to look a fool in the sight of his fellow rulers]. The manager resorted that honour by allowing the master to emerge as a supremely generous person, elevating the master to a position of the supreme nobility amongst his peers. He had ‘read’ his master correctly – he wasn’t about to spoil the party by disowning the manager. Would the master still dismiss the manager privately? Maybe not, but even if the manager did find himself unemployed, he would not have to go digging for a living because the people of the village would welcome him – as the one who forgave their debts? No. Not his money. Not to his credit. No, they would welcome him as one who represents the Master, the Master who forgave, the Master, who at His cost, settled the debts that they owed to him. [If they thought for a moment that the manager had acted dishonestly, they would have disowned him – would you harbour a felon who had robbed the chief constable of your city?]

And my, what a celebration he will enjoy. I do hope that as you go about your calling today, that it will be as one whose life is lived as a celebration, as one whose life compels others to say “Wow, you’ve got something and I want it too. Tell me more.”

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.



Verses from the Book of Acts, on which Jesus built his church!

(- and is still building His Church, to this very day!.....)

(1) Acts 1:8 – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Pray for his presence, power and poise in your life – every day (is.26:3,4)!

(2) Acts 2:38 – “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you In the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ “

Preach the ‘four square’ gospel message constantly and consistently, To God’s honour and glory and leave the results with him (John 1:12,13)!

(3) Acts 3:6 – “But Peter said, ‘I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ “

Pass on whatever temporal or spiritual gift you have, So as to encourage and to enrich another (Rom 13:8)!

(4) Acts 4:12 – “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

God’s way of salvation for mankind is very particular and very precise – It is only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John14:6)!

(5) Acts 5:11 – “And great fear came upon the whole Church and upon all who heard these things.”

Don’t even think of playing with god! God is pure, holy, awesome and good (Galatians 6:7)!

(6) Acts 6:7 – “And the Word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

God watches over his church – it expands purposefully, strategically and securely – just like bees who would build a remarkable honeycomb (Eph4:12)!

(7) Acts 7:59,60 – “ As they were stoning Stephen he called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, Lord do not hold this sin against them. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

The persecuted church is still setting the pace in patience, perseverance, victory over pride and being pleasing to the lord (Philip 1:6,21)!

In CONCLUSION, read and reflect on Psalm 34 for yourself!

- Amen.



The wonders of God's Kingdom

"This is how it is with the kingdom of God." Mark 4: 26-34

Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how." Mark 4:26-27

What a beautiful image of the sprouting, growing and coming to fruition of the Kingdom of God in our midst! God wills that His Kingdom come. We pray this in the Lord's Prayer. What does it mean when we pray for His Kingdom to come?

First, it means that God wants to come and dwell within us, establishing His Kingdom within our hearts and souls. We must become living members of His Kingdom and He must be our Ruler and Guide. Second, we understand this to be the establishment of His laws and will in our world. This means that the social, political and cultural order must be transformed by God's grace so as to participate in and bear the fruit of His Kingdom. We have work to do! Third, it means that we anticipate the final and glorious coming of His Kingdom when Jesus returns in splendor and majesty. In the end, all things will be transformed and God will bring forth

His final judgment upon the world making all things new.

But this passage above especially reveals to us "how" this will happen. It reveals that God's Kingdom will slowly, gently, and miraculously take hold. This will happen in our lives, it will happen in our world as we Christians commit ourselves to this work, and it will miraculously happen at the end of time when Jesus returns. Think about this image Jesus gives us. The farmer plants the seed and slowly it sprouts, grows and produces fruit. As this happens, the farmer *"knows not how."*

Let us reflect, today, upon the mysterious ways that God establishes His Kingdom. He is in charge of it first and foremost. But we must do our part. We must make our heart and world around us fertile ground. We must plant the seed, water it as needed but then let God do His part. God wants to bring forth His Kingdom in our lives and in the world far more than any of us. But if we do our part, we also will be amazed as we watch grow His glorious handiwork of grace.

So let's pray to Him.

Lord, help my heart to be fertile soil for Your Kingdom. Help me to allow You to grow Your Kingdom in my heart and help me to be an instrument of that Kingdom in our world. Jesus, I trust in You.

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"Step by step"

"Direct my footsteps according to your word" Psalm 119:133

I love mountains. For me they speak of majesty, strength and peace. They are one of the best expressions of the splendour and greatness of God the creator.

I still enjoy climbing, even if, judging by the time it takes me to reach the top of a particular peak, it seems to increase in height each year.

This summer, I climbed above a glacier in the Alps. It was not a particularly difficult climb (although, as it got higher, I had to stop more regularly to "admire the view").

What facilitated the task is that guides had marked out a track by painting strips on stones and rocks at regular intervals. All I had to do to avoid danger or getting lost was follow the marks. Some times the marked stones had been covered by rockslides. On a couple of occasions I was caught in mist that made it impossible to see the marks. Once I decided to take a "shortcut" that led me to a sheer rock face on one side and a precipice on the other and forced me to retrace my steps until I found the markers again. Circumstances and my own self-centeredness made the task more complex and arduous than it need have been.

As I face the complexities and challenges of daily life, I thank God that He has not abandoned me in the fog of confusion. By His word, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the testimony and experience of those who have gone before me, He has placed clear markers to keep me on the right track.

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians is very relevant for my daily life.

"May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love." II Thessalonians 3:5.

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.



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.



Saying Farewell Well

For various reasons every now and then people will leave Leprosy Mission Programs and Teams. Program support and field staff will frequently say farewell to participants and beneficiaries. How do we do this well? *Please Read Acts 20:17-36 First*

Let me set this scene a little bit for us. Paul is one of the founders of the early church. He is speaking to the leaders of one of the churches he helped found. Paul is someone who cared deeply for people. He cared deeply that they would come to know Jesus.

Paul is on his way to jail, and hardship. And he tells these people who he knows, who he loves and who love him that they will never see him again. Imagine being in the room with him on this night.

This man has taught them so much. He has taught them about Jesus. Now they are saying bye. They are weeping together. They are worried for him. They are unsure about what will happen to them.

This feeling is probably familiar to you. It is ok for us to be sad when we say farewell. People we care for deeply will be going. There are three ways this passage can help us have positive farewells.

1. It is ok to be sad and mourn when we say farewell to team members, or beneficiaries and participants. Paul weeps with this team of people, and they cry with him because they love each other and are concerned for each other, and they are saying farewell.
2. Remember the mission. Paul reminds the leaders of the Ephesian church of their job - they are to keep following Jesus. We have a mission here. We are called to a purpose. This doesn't change when we say farewell to people.
3. Paul sets their eyes on Jesus.

We have a mission. But there will be times we say farewell. And it is biblical and appropriate to mourn and reflect on this. So being sad is good.

But saying bye should come in context of point number two. There are still people affected by leprosy to help.

And what I want to encourage you is this: If you are feeling angry about a team member leaving. If you are feeling bitter. If you are feeling resentful. If you are feeling worried. Please. Go and talk to your manager. We have a mission and we can only do this if we are doing it together. Be honest with your manager. Be honest with God. Don't let sadness become bitterness or resentment when people leave.

That's points one and two: It's ok to be sad. But let's be sad in a way which honours God, the people who have left, ourselves and the leadership team.

Point three: Paul sets their eyes on Jesus. One of the names Jesus is known as is Emmanuel. It's a lovely name, which has an even better meaning. It means "God with us".

We see this in Jesus' life. He is truly God with us. He was with Paul on his journey and he is with us. In the histories about Jesus we see him mourn with sisters who have lost a brother. We see him comfort a mother who has lost her son. He comforts his mother. We see his concern for people who have been badly let. He is truly God with us.

We may be sad, we may be mourning, and this is right. But Jesus is with us.



All for His glory!

„So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” 1 Cor 10,32

There is always the danger that we may just do the work for the sake of the work.

This is where the respect and the love and the devotion come in - that we do it to God, to Christ, and that's why we try to do it as beautifully as possible.

Mother Teresa



Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Asaph, psalmist	14 July		2 Kings 24,8-17	16 July
Christine Osman	4 July		Psalm 1	13 July
Dan Izzett	3 July		Psalm 47	1 July
David, King of Israel	15, 21, 22, 28, 29 July		Psalm 48	7 July
Elisabeth Barnett	2 July		Psalm 49	8 July
Henno Couprie	13 July		Psalm 50	14 July
Johan Velema Dr	16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23 July		Psalm 51	15 July
Moses Onoh Dr	26 July		Psalm 52	21 July
Mother Teresa	31 July		Psalm 53	22 July
Otto Kingsley	25 July		Psalm 54	28 July
Peter Laubscher	24 July		Psalm 55	29 July
Pradeep and Sarah Failbus	10, 11 July		Psalm 119,133	27 July
Raju Dr PLN	5, 6 July		Prov 4,23-27	3 July
Silvano Perotti	9, 27 July		Jeremiah 29,1-14	19 July
Sons of Korah	1, 7, 8 July		Ezekiel 1,1-3	16 July
Tim Collison	30 July		Ezekiel 4,1-15	23 July
Trevor Durston	12 July		Ezekiel 11,1-13	17 July
			Ezekiel 18,19-24, 30-32	18 July
			Ezekiel 36,16-28	20 July
			Mark 1,9-15	2 July
			Mark 4,26-34	26 July
			Luke 10,38-42	10, 11 July
			Luke 16	24 July
			John 19,4	8 July
			Acts 1,8	25 July
			Acts 20,17-36	30 July
			1 Cor 10,32	31 July
			2 Cor 4,1-7	12 July
			Gal 5,13-15, 22-25	4 July
			Eph 4,17-32	5, 6 July