



TLM Daily Devotions

November 2016





The First “Birthday”!

Almost unbelievable... The Bridge started one year ago with a ‘trial run’ for Advent, and we celebrate its first “birthday” on the 29th November!

What then was a prayerful call: “How can the accumulated outstanding spiritual capital of TLM-people be mobilised and demonstrated in the daily life of our mission?” in hindsight seems to have become an ongoing practice: “A spiritual portrait gallery – devotions written by both retired and active TLMers - creating a bridge.”

Praise the Lord!

Thanks to Everyone for building The Bridge between past and future, North and South, East and West, heaven and earth. My prayer and hope is that our beloved TLM Fellowship becomes stronger, our love of Jesus, people affected by leprosy and of each other deepens through it.

Thanks to Christine Osman and to Mo Lewis for kindly doing the proof reading, to Allan Ekstedt for faithfully doing the theological proof!

Come on and join us more and more in building:

The Kingdom!

Blessed reading, TLMers!

Marta



The Resurrection of the Dead

All Saints' Day

1 Corinthians 15 New International Version

15 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas,^[b] and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he 'has put everything under his feet'.^[c] Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Apostle Paul, born Saul of Tarsus (c. 5 – c 67)

In many countries this day is held as "All Saints' Day". Let us fix today our eyes on our eternal hope and assurance: Jesus Christ!



The Resurrection Body

Nov 2: All Souls' Day

1 Corinthians 15 (NIVUK)

³⁵ But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” ³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. ³⁹ Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”^[f]; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we^[g] bear the image of the heavenly man.

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”^[h]

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”^[i]

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Apostle Paul, born Saul of Tarsus (c. 5 – c 67)



A Faith With Action

James 2 v 14-26

A few weeks ago, as darkness was approaching, there was a knock at our front door. As I opened the door a young man from New Zealand said that he and his fiancée were cycling through Britain and asked if they could pitch their tent in our garden for one night.

I hesitated, and in that moment of hesitation, the young man said that if I was uncomfortable it really didn't matter and they would move on. So, I proceeded to tell them about a local hostel that I thought would be more suitable and started to give him directions.

However, as I was telling him how to get to the hostel I heard that still small voice asking me what I had been preaching about the day before in our local church.

As part of my sermon I had asked the question whether we put conditions on who we welcome, or do we give an unconditional welcome to all who come through the doors of our church?

And so, realising that my actions were not in line with my words, and as I was telling him to turn right, then first left, I said "You know what? Why don't you and your fiancée pitch your tent in my garden."

He looked at me strangely and then said, with genuine gratitude, "Thank you so much".

As I reflected on what had happened, I was reminded what James had written in the second chapter of his epistle, that faith without action is dead. (James 2 v 14-26).

We live in a time where Christianity has never been under so much scrutiny, so as we serve our Lord may we always "walk the talk" and by our actions people will see Jesus Christ in us.

Gordon Brown

Scotland - 2008-2011 Vice Chair of TLM Scotland, 2011-2015 Honorary Treasurer of TLM International



Perfectly united

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought"
1 Corinthians 1:10

Paul wrote this to the Church in Corinth who, eighteen months after he left, had begun to argue among themselves and divisions had arisen. The Corinthians had a reputation for jumping from fad to fad and Paul was determined to see that Christianity would not become just another fad.

Paul calls them "*brothers*" – emphasising that all Christians are part of God's family and that Believers share a unity that goes deeper than that of blood brothers and sisters.

To "*agree with one another*" and to be "*perfectly united in mind and thought*" does not mean that everyone has to believe exactly the same thing. There is a difference between having opposing viewpoints and being divisive. A group of people will never agree completely on every issue but they can work together in harmony if they agree on what truly matters – Jesus Christ is Lord of all!!

As we work together in our churches, in our homes and in our work places we can be assured that in spite of our personal differences, as long as we keep Jesus at the centre of all we do, we can be "*perfectly united in mind and thought.*"

Mo Lewis

Former PA to the HR Director
TLM International Office
Brentford
January 1993 – January 2014



Rules for holy living

Colossians 3:1-11

Paul did not know the church in Colossae personally, but he cared for them, even when he was in prison far away. At the beginning of the letter, he calls them “holy and faithful”, and says that he prays for them constantly. And so he writes to build them up. They are already holy and faithful but they need help in living a holy life, just like us.

We are raised with Christ (verse 1, 2)

We know that no-one will give up smoking or drugs successfully if they do not really want to. We will need our heart and our minds, our emotions and our brains, to live the life God wants for us.

We have new life with Christ (verse 3, 4)

We are hidden with Christ in God but when Christ appears, we will appear with him in glory – so we have great motivation.

In our new life, we have a new way of life (verse 5)

We put to death (regard as dead) whatever is not holy.
It is a conscious decision to turn away from evil.

That was the way you used to live (verses 5-9)

God hates our evil desires and lack of self-control. He hates our anger, rage, malice and slander, our bad language, gossip and lies. Paul uses the word for undressing. Paul is reminding us not to put on dirty clothes after a shower. We must get rid of those and leave them behind.

Instead, put on new kit, a new self. We are “being renewed in knowledge in the image of the creator”; that’s helping us see things in God’s way, seeing things from his point of view. (verse 10)

And one way we know we are seeing things God’s way is that we realise that we are all one in Christ. If we are being recreated in the image of God, all the normal distinctions and discriminations don’t matter – gender, race, culture, social class – they are all one to God.

But is this still relevant if we have been Christians for many years?

You’ve probably heard the story. A mother sees her son in army uniform for the first time. “Oh my child,” she says, “you are a soldier. How proud I am!” But then the Sergeant comes along and shouts “Obey my orders and I will make you into a soldier.” Who is right? Is the young man a soldier already or will he become one?

One of the frequent messages in Paul’s letters is “Become what you already are”. We are Christians, we are saved, we have already crossed over from darkness to light. But we are still in training, we have not yet become what Jesus needs us to be. So whether we have been Christians for days or for years, we are all walking together on the road towards holiness.

Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts and minds on things above... when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory.

Paul and Niki Jakeman

served as TLM missionaries from 1979-1994, successively in Mongar, Lhuntse and Thimphu (Bhutan) and then in Singapore. They returned to the UK and worked in the east end of London for ten years, moving to Wiltshire where they continued medicine and midwifery for another decade. They have both recently retired.



Psalm 2 - A Messianic psalm

¹ Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
² The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,
³ "Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles."

⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
⁵ He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
⁶ "I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain."

⁷ I will proclaim the LORD's decree:

He said to me, "You are my son;
today I have become your father.
⁸ Ask me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.
⁹ You will break them with a rod of iron^[b];
you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.
¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear
and celebrate his rule with trembling.
¹² Kiss his son, or he will be angry
and your way will lead to your destruction,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.



Only If I See It For Myself

Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' (John 20:27. NIV)

He was a patient at the Chikankata Hospital in Zambia. I can see his feet in my mind's eye now - overly large in size, with splayed toes and a hallux varus. They looked more like hands than feet. Recurrent plantar ulcers brought him back to us, for bed rest or plaster cast, and always with protective footwear and repeated attempts at education.

He had bilateral dropped feet. We had shown him the results of tendon transfers on others. We did our best to persuade him to follow suit. 'What exactly will you do?' was his question. We explained carefully, but he was dogged in his refusal. 'No, doctor -- this is how they are. I don't want you to operate on them.'

We tried, the physiotherapist tried; satisfied patients who'd had the surgery told him how easy the post-op education was. But resistance continued. I tried joking, I played draughts with him, but still no progress. I was losing hope.

One day a few weeks later, the plantar ulcer now well and truly healed, we stopped at his bed and posed our question. 'Are you ready for the operation now?' I asked, fully expecting another refusal. 'Just one thing,' he replied. 'You do the operation. Once it's opened, show me what you've done before you tie the tendon in place.'

I gulped. 'What an unusual request,' I thought, 'But if that leads to something better for him, why not.' These days a CCTV camera would have made it much easier, but not so in a 1970s mission hospital in rural Zambia. Regional anaesthesia made it a possibility, so that's what happened. Once everything was opened he sat up. We explained, he nodded thanks and laid down, content. He recovered well. The second operation went ahead a few months later without him having to see the tendon.

Thomas could be described as forerunner of the modern commitment to evidence-based medicine. He needed a little more than someone else's say-so before he believed. Thomas didn't only have to see the wound; he needed to put his finger inside it. And remarkably, Jesus invited him to put his finger right there.

The result: Thomas found faith, with those profound words: *'My Lord and my God.'*

But Jesus did conclude by saying to the disciples: *'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'*

Most of the time I'm willing to follow with blind faith; but being able to see makes it a lot easier. There's probably at least half a Thomas in me. And I'm quite a bit like my patient, even though our feet are shaped differently.

Dr Paul du Plessis

After a lifetime of service with The Salvation Army, South African born Paul and his wife, Margaret, have retired in the UK. Paul has had a number of honorary roles with TLM dating back to his work at TLM Field Representative for Zambia in the 1970s when based at Chikankata Hospital with associated leprosarium which closed with 'normalisation' in the 1990s.



Getting To Know You

'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.' (John 10:14 NIV)

One of the tasks assigned me when we arrived at The Salvation Army hospital with associated leprosarium in Zambia in 1968 was to be leader of the troop of Boy Scouts. There were about a dozen, pupils of the national school for children with leprosy. I'd had many happy years as a scout myself, so relished the idea, and indeed it was fun.

Troop night included some of the traditional scouting activities of tying knots and simple first aid, semaphore signalling and of course always the games. The boys especially enjoyed the 'wide games' on the surrounding hills, capturing a lantern from a tree being defended by one patrol from the attack of another. They loved it. So did I.

'How about a weekend camp?' I asked.

'Oh, yes, sir,' came the ready reply.

So a few weeks later, off we went, dragging a cart loaded with food and water and our personal kit. I remember their home-made song as we went:

*Change down the gear, driver, driver,
Change down the gear*

We set up camp just a few miles away, beside a stream and under a spreading acacia tree -- kitchen and latrine included.

We slept under the stars around the embers of the camp fire and awoke to the activities of the next day. One of those I'd planned was a 'sand story', leaving foot prints and other clues to work out exactly what had happened. It was as complicated as I could make it, but the boys solved it within minutes.

'How come?' I asked, 'It seems to come naturally to you.'

They smiled. 'We are expected to look after our father's cattle,' they explained, 'We have to get to know them really well, including their hoof-prints. If one of the cattle is missing we have to follow the trail.'

We struck camp and returned home singing, with a slight variation on the song. We were all tired, but the step seemed lighter.

*Change up the gear, driver, driver,
Change up the gear*

It had been a happy weekend. I suspect they learned something; I certainly did.

'He knows me,' I reflected in thought. 'The hairs of my head are numbered; he knows the palm of my hand. He even knows the footprints we leave behind.'

The weekend camping had been a really good way to get to know them in ways that went well beyond mycobacterium leprae and the life it had brought them.

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Full Surrender

'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship.' (Romans 12:1 NIV)

There were three options for church membership when we arrived at Chikankata Hospital in Zambia in 1968: the English medium services at the school, or in the local vernacular, ciTonga, at the nearby village or the one at the leprosarium. We chose the latter. It took a little more concentration, and the occasional help of a translator to grasp the full meaning of what was being said, or for the congregation to understand what we meant when we contributed. But it was good for us in many ways, not least that it improved our communication skills. We loved going.

By local custom the hundred-or-more congregation was generally separated by gender, seated on uncomfortably low, backless benches. Leprosy segregation in church had long since gone. Staff mingled with patients. I usually took my place with the drummers up front, mostly using our fingers and hands on a variety of locally made wooden drums with taut cowhide to produce a range of pitch and rhythm. The choir sat opposite us. Their contribution was always appreciated as they moved forward singing one of their own compositions in traditional African style as they did.

The scriptures would be read; there would be an expository message. I remember none of those. In keeping with the non-liturgical denominational traditions of congregational participation there would be opportunities to speak with short testimony in thanksgiving for what God had done in our lives. We were also free to contribute *ex tempore* prayers. One that remains in my memory is hearing the newly arrived Salvation Army chaplain appointed to the leprosarium, pray earnestly that God would help him to get to know the people (and especially their names).

But the highlight of every worship service was the offering. The leader would announce this, the choir would start singing, the congregation would come forward. Clawed hands or two fingerless palms holding a coin would drop the offering into the hand-woven baskets on the table at the front of the church.

A translated version of an old gospel song with its haunting melody was part of the ritual:

*All to Jesus I surrender, all to him a freely give ...I surrender all,
All to thee my blessed saviour, I surrender all.*

I often wondered quite what was in the minds of the givers as they came forward. Was it mere ritual, or was there something much deeper -- gratitude, hope, confession, a search for cleansing, an act of solidarity, a moment of commitment, or just simply love for God?

We all came bringing our offering. They came with so little; we had much more. But we all came in the spirit of offering more than money. Paul had urged the Romans to present their bodies. They came with bodies damaged, yet they came. We came alongside them with our bodies, to offer what we had, and who we were. That must have pleased God.

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The Sins of a Leprosarium

'There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.' (Romans 3:22-24 NIV)

He was just a teenager, now a couple of hundred miles from home, referred for confirmation of the diagnosis and then schooling.

'But I don't know how I got it,' he told me. 'You get leprosy either from your parents - but mine are fine - or you get it because you've stolen someone's maize protected by a special powder - I promise you I've never stolen anything.'

Like many others, he thought leprosy was the result of some wrongdoing. I went on to explain the transmission of the disease. He seemed relieved.

He would stay in 'the boys' compound', part of the leprosarium for a few hundred people. He would become part of the community which reflected village life in rural Zambia. Generally they got on well with each other, though there were the inevitable disagreements and misdemeanours common to us all.

The wisdom of my predecessors had resulted in the establishment of a community committee, elected by the patients to promote the well-being of the residents and to maintain the peace. One of their tasks was to judge cases brought before them by the 'kaposos', the equivalent of community police support officers of the traditional courts. Assault, theft, drunkenness, sexual misconduct were the main complaints. Though a small room was set aside for detention, reprimand and warning were the usual sentences. Inevitably there would be a referral to the chaplain for pastoral guidance and rehabilitation.

We asked for assistance from the national law and order authorities, but their answer was usually the same. 'You sort it out; we don't want to have anything to do with them.' Was this not another of the sins of the leprosarium, I thought.

Occasionally the committee failed to reach a decision so the doctor was called, as though he could add the wisdom of Solomon. He came reluctantly, knowing that the sins of the leprosarium were probably no greater than his own, or those with which he had to deal among staff of the mission across the stream, and up the hill.

But if all had sinned, so also could all be justified by grace, through the redemption made possible by Christ. That was the message we'd come to deliver. It applies to us too.

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Remembrance Day

“Greater love has no-one than this; to lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

In many countries 11 November is known as “Remembrance Day”, when we commemorate the sacrifice of millions who died in the two World Wars of 1914 – 1918 and 1939 – 1945. Some Christians find this distasteful, a glorification of death and destruction which contradicts the Christian Gospel of peace. However, forgetting the millions who died in those conflicts would not only show ingratitude to their sacrifice, it would show an ignorance of the lessons that can be learnt from those tragic decades. At the height of the second world war, Japanese imperialism dominated the entire Pacific region with millions living under a brutal occupation and Japanese bombers reaching from the western edges of the USA to the northern coast of Australia, while Fascism was laying waste to most of Europe and much of north Africa at the same time as engineering the largest genocide in history against the Jews. Defeating these twin evils was not just a European/North-American endeavour (however Hollywood portrays it), but sucked in millions of men (and often women), of all ages and from most countries, including almost all 32 members of the TLM Global Fellowship. Most of us in TLM today had parents or grand-parents who were involved or affected in some way.

Today’s world continues to be ravaged by conflicts, although now the uniforms of “good guys” and “bad guys” are harder to differentiate and many of the combatants don’t wear one at all, blurring the laws which distinguish fighters from civilians. In Myanmar, Sudan, South-Sudan, Nigeria, and DR Congo TLM works in countries still beset by conflicts which not only take lives but drain national resources, displace whole populations, ruin infrastructure and feed the evils of discrimination, mistrust and corruption. Many other TLM countries including Angola, Mozambique, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor L’Este only recently emerged from long conflicts and insurgencies whose shadow still hangs over them; while almost all TLM member countries are threatened by terrorism of various forms.

Jesus weeps at the mess our world is in. Having lived and been executed under a brutal Roman occupation Jesus experienced humanity at its worst. That is why he inspired us all to bring out the best in ourselves. Jesus’ message of love for ALL others, which inspired those Christians who smuggled Jews away from the Nazis also motivates those who defy stigma against people with leprosy and advocate for their rights. The biblical mandate to feed the hungry was as true for those brave sailors whose food conveyed dodged German submarines and Arctic storms to feed the British and the Russians as it is for those TLM workers doing farming projects today. God’s commands to stand up to evil and injustice, which motivated millions from all over the world to unite against the bigotry of Fascism are the same which drive us today to unite against the disease of leprosy and the fear, ignorance and prejudice which cause so much suffering. Today let’s take a minute to remember the bravery and sacrifice of our ancestors in two world wars. Let’s take another minute to pray for peace in today’s world, especially within TLM member countries. Then let’s be inspired to take on our own fight with renewed vigour, re-assured that whatever sacrifices this job involves, it’s unlikely to cost our lives, and that all evils, however terrifying, can eventually be defeated when we stand as one against them, and submit our cause to God.



Palaces

“One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple.” Psalm 27:4

Last week, following our Fellowship meetings, I took advantage of the delightful autumnal weather to walk through the parks of London, passing Buckingham Palace along the way. I noticed a crowd close to the railings. I assumed a parade was taking place, but as I drew nearer, I was surprised to see the parade ground deserted. The visitors were simply standing there, looking longingly at the building. Were they hoping for a sign of acknowledgement? A twitch of a curtain, perhaps? A whispered welcome?

I suppose that most of us have wondered what it would be like to dwell in a palace, to live, even for a day, as a princess [if you have a teenage daughter at home, you probably know the answer to *that* question already]. I know the tabloids would have us believe that it is a gilded cage – to which I reply, “Lock me up and throw away the key ...” Now, here’s the thing.

I was eight years old when I first pressed my freckled nose against that palisade, hair cropped short, ears sticking out, sulking because Mom made me wear shoes to visit London. Since then, I’ve walked past the Palace numerous times [always wearing shoes, not so much with hair] and not once have I seen anyone on the inside looking out, curious about life on the other side of the railings, intrigued by my lifestyle.

“So you drive a 1987 Ford - spares have to be a problem”; “You commute on the Central Line - you must meet lots of new friends every day!” “Toasted sarmies for supper – would that be white bread or brown?” As the saying went during the Cold War, no-one ever got shot crossing the Berlin Wall from West to East Germany.

Whatever they discuss inside the palace, probably doesn’t include envious references to our lives. It seems to me that mankind rather likes this idea of royalty – be it the royalty of Bollywood, the telestocracy or Silicon Valley – who live lives that are in some ways remote and detached from the realities of schlepping children to school in the middle of winter or struggling with the self-service checkout at Tesco – even if we’re not all that fond of palaces [ask your South African friend for their opinion of Nkanlida].

I got to thinking about the Royal Family to which we belong [1 Peter 2:9] and how different it is. Maybe you’d like to reflect on these differences during your devotions today? Two thoughts: Our King, the Prodigal Father, does stand at the gate, anxiously awaiting our return [Luke 15:20] and He knows the realities of life [Isaiah 53:3]. One contrast I enjoy is the thought that to enter an earthly palace, you need to be on important business, presenting your credentials as an ambassador, perhaps. To enter His Kingdom, we have to become “as little children” [Matthew 18:3]. I wonder which is the harder of the two tasks?

A final thought: A while back, a group of us from the Leprosy Mission were discussing some of the crazy places to which our work has taken us. An element of complaint crept into the discussion. Then one of our group said “The Bible tells me that I’m a son of God. That makes me a prince. Now, the place where a prince sleeps at night is a palace. That means that wherever I sleep at night is also a palace. Every night I sleep in a palace, even if it’s a tent in the bush.” *“Father, wherever you send me today, let your presence transform it into a palace where others know they are welcome.”*

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 princess and the frog

*“But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.”
Luke 10:33*

A beautiful princess was walking through the palace garden with her sister when they saw a frog. The frog spoke. “I’m not really a frog,” he said. “I’ve been bewitched and if you’ll pick me up and kiss me I’ll turn back into a handsome prince. We’ll fall in love and live happily ever after.” The princess picked up the frog, looked at him and then put him in her handbag. “Why don’t you kiss him?” asked her sister. “Oh, said the princess. “There’s a handsome prince on every street corner but with a talking frog I can make a fortune.”

Love or money. Compassion or market forces? Which do we value most? A report on TV told of a couple who were running a successful business but they were giving all their profits away to help other people. One of them said, “We believe you become a millionaire when you’ve given a million pounds away not when you’ve got a million pounds in the bank.” I think that’s great.

Of course most of us would like the chance of choosing what to do with our first million, but the principle’s good. What do we do with what we’ve got, whether it’s money in the bank or our talents and abilities? We can use what we have for ourselves or we can use it to give something to the community we live in. It’s great to hear of people who put others first in such a positive and practical way as that business couple.

Really successful living can be counted by the folk we’ve helped along the way rather than by what we’ve squirreled away for ourselves.

Lord, giver of life and love, may I share as much in giving as in getting.

Extract from Love is a Wild Bird, first published 2003, with the kind permission of Jo-Anne Thomson and Judith Merrell from TLM Trading)

Eddie Askew

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)



Ebenezer

1 Samuel 7:12 "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "till now the LORD has helped us."

It had been a terrible time for the Israelis. The Ark had been captured! They must have felt that God had abandoned them. Everything must have been dark and gloomy. Then the Lord intervened, the ark was recovered and here we have Samuel raising a stone called Ebenezer to remind them. Ebenezer – hitherto has the Lord helped us.

Over recent months I have really been struggling health wise. It has been hard to find the Lord in it all especially when it took all of my energy to survive. Yet He was there and one of the blessings has been visits from friends that I knew from PNG days. They were "doing" Europe and wanted to spend time with me too. We spent a lot of time "raising Ebenezer" sharing the things that we had learnt from the Lord in PNG days and some of the stories of what He did and what we said. What a blessing. So good to remember that the Lord has helped, will help and will continue to do so. He is faithful and doesn't change. It doesn't depend on the way we feel, it depends on Him and He is unchangeable – a rock.

Sometimes it is good to look back and remember. As the old hymn "Come Thou fount of every blessing" says

*Here I raise my Ebenezer,
Hither by Thy help I've come;
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.*

June Nash

I have worked for the Leprosy Mission for 35 years. At first I was on the mission field in Papua New Guinea and then Ethiopia. In the beginning I did leprosy control but then moved into the training of health workers. It was a privilege to serve overseas with TLM for 20 years. I returned to be part of the team in Brentford, firstly as global training adviser, then HR Director and lastly as Knowledge Management Director. I am now retired but being a part of the Leprosy Mission never really leaves you. I continue to hold the work in my heart through prayer and visits to Brentford.



'Real Good!' – 1.

May this morning's 'Bible-chain' meditation bless you 'real good'!

Genesis 14:14-“Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive,he armed his 318 trained servants who were born in his own house,and went in pursuit as far as Dan.”

Yes, I am my brother's keeper, and I will go the second mile for my family today!

Exodus 14:14-“The LORD shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”

Yes, today, I will let go and let God!.....

Joshua 14:14-“Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizite to this day, because he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel.”

God will never fail to reward His 'good and faithful' servants one way or the other!

Judges 14:14-“Out of the eater came something to eat,and out of the strong came something sweet.”

Today - don't play games with the world!

1 Kings 14:14-“Moreover the LORD will raise up for Himself a king over Israel who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam; this is the day. What? Even now!”

Today - don't play games with God!

1 Chronicles 14:14-“Therefore David inquired AGAIN of God, and God said to him, ‘You shall not go after them; circle around them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees.’

Don't make an important decision today, without first consulting with God!

Otto Kingsley is the Cape Regional Director of TLM (SA) – based in Cape Town, RSA.



'Real Good!' – 2.

Proverbs 14:14-“The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways, but a good man will be satisfied from above.” Today, I believe afresh: Only You Lord God, can seek, save and satisfy my never-dying soul!

Isaiah 14:14-“I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.” Today - don't play games with the devil!

Jeremiah 14:14-“And the LORD said to me, 'The prophets prophesy lies in My Name, I have not sent them, nor commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, deceit of their heart.’” Today - don't play games in your ministry!

Ezekiel 14:14-“Even if these 3 men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would only deliver themselves by their righteousness,’ says the LORD God.” Only the just (in Christ), will live through the Judgement! (cf John 16:8)

Matthew 14:14-“And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and He healed their sick” Today remember, Jesus is willing and able to help you, or anybody else! (cf Mark 1:41)

Luke 14:14-“And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” Today remember, “it is more blessed to give, than to receive!”

John 14:14-“If you ask anything in My Name, I will do it.” Today - pray much and often, in the Name of Jesus!

1 Corinthians 14:14-“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful (busy chilling).” Today - be praying in the Spirit!

Revelation 14:14-“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.” Today – work, but also anticipate: The glorious Return of our Lord Jesus Christ! - Amen.



Jesus Reinstates broken Peter - He will do same for us

John 21

Even though Jesus appeared to Peter and other disciple few times after the resurrection but Peter decided to go back to his old profession..... fishing. Few other disciples also decided to follow Peter and went with him for fishing.

Peter is not liked by group of readers of Gospels because of his personality & character and his up & down relationships with Jesus. One of the main reasons of this feeling towards Peter is due to Peter's denial to Jesus three times after even he was warned in advance by Jesus for the same. In today's world Peter is called unfaithful, disloyal and not trustworthy to Jesus. Even though Peter was liked & trusted by Jesus and Jesus always kept Peter very close to him but Peter's response was just opposite to Jesus. This is ours judgment for Peter, calling him not trustworthy & not loyal but this is not the same from the side of Jesus. Even though Peter betrayed and denied Jesus but Jesus never questioned about this to Peter. He continues trusting & loving Peter after the resurrection also.

The final act of not understanding Jesus, His promises and His assurance came when Peter decided not to wait for Jesus as per His promise but decided to leave all relationship with Jesus and to go back to his old professional Fishing. Again we see that Jesus had so loving & caring heart for Peter. When we come to the last Chapter of John (21) where we read last encounter of Jesus with Peter, we see that Jesus never questions about his unfaithfulness and not trusting His promises. The only question he asked three times.....Do you love me? Then after receiving Peter's affirmative answer, Jesus gives him great responsibility..... "Feed my lambs and take care of my sheep".

These entire episodes of relationships between Jesus and Peter set great example for many of us who are broken or back sliding because of any reason. This assures us that Jesus in not going to question us where/why/how, we became unfaithful to Him at different times of our life. He only wants to be assured from us like in Peter's case, whether we love Him or not? Then He also gives us command to take care of His people.

We see here that in spite of repeated Peter's failure and shortcomings, Jesus never stop trusting and loving Peter. He kept on giving another chance to Peter to build up the broken relationship with Him. This is something very important for us to remind us that when we are lost or broken, that Jesus will not stop loving & caring us in spite of our human failure. No such behavior of ours will stop His love and forgiveness to us. He is there to give us another chance repeatedly so that we can build up our broken relationship with Him. But this is also important that we continue to love Jesus and follow his commands.

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



A Christlike work in the world

Matthew 5 : 16 NLT- "..., let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

There have always been discussions in The Leprosy Mission about "what is Mission" and "what does that mean for TLM?" Many of us are engaged in such a discussion, after all we love our heavenly Father, we encourage one another to live and walk in the love He has for us and to make Him known.

Wellesley Bailey wrote in 1869, after his first meeting with people in a leprosy asylum:

"I almost shuddered, yet I was at the same time fascinated, and I felt if there was ever a Christlike work in the world it was to go amongst these poor sufferers and bring them the consolation of the gospel."

In a discussion about 'Mission' one should listen to each other when trying to explore:

" what does a 'Christlike work in the world' contributes to Mission?"

Today I had to edit a text for a magazine. Among other facts the text said:

"The majority of the people who do not know Jesus Christ have no contact with Christians."

The author added:

"We live in our Christian community as if we live in a bubble. We are (over)active and have no time for people whom we do not know."

The author challenged us:

"To mix with people whom we do not know, with people who may not hear from others about Jesus Christ."

That text reminded me to the words of Wellesley Bailey: *"a Christlike work in the world"*.

Do people *'in and of the world'*, who have no contact with Christians, get opportunity to see us engaged in a Christlike work.

Will it make a difference for them when we let our good deeds shine?

Of course we have to ask ourselves: "Is it Christlike, what we do?" and "Is it Christlike, the way we do it?"

But then, after having searched our heart and the spirit in our team: do give others the opportunity to see your work, to see Christ at work from nearby!

I know, there are plenty people who see the work of people employed by TLM. But do they get a chance to see how it transforms us, how we ourselves are affected by what people go through in the projects in which we serve?

Personally, for my wife and I, our new challenge, in our new environment, the place we live in since 10 month as retired people, is to let our light, our good deeds shine among our neighbours. Our challenge is also to live a Christlike life among them.

And so I am often reminded to the start of our Leprosy Mission.

Piet Both, former employee of TLM and a trainee, like all of us, in Mission



If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him

Read: 2 Kings 5: 14-17 (or better, the whole chapter) and Luke 17 v 11-19

Being involved in a Missionary Organisation, fighting against leprosy in the name of Jesus, it seems important to listen to what the Bible has to say about leprosy, and perhaps to learn something which could have passed unnoticed or at least underestimated. When the Bible uses the term "Leper", this reflects the fact that their disease is the symbol of curse and rejection. In the eyes of Society, Leprosy People do not count, they are **"living dead"**. Our recent contacts with our friends from Nepal, and especially remarks heard after Ashok and Romila's testimony made me aware of such a possibility.

In Nepal, people affected by leprosy have had and still have a great influence to the development of the Church. It is only sixty years that the Gospel has come to this Country which is still regarded by all Hindus as their inviolable land. Yet despite a materially and politically very difficult situation, progress of the Gospel is spectacular. Why? Could this be something from which we could learn in the light of today's biblical texts?

Leprosy affected people lose everything. The powerful general Naaman still enjoys all the consideration of the Syrian people and that of the King. But for how long? The ten lepers who come to meet Jesus are human wrecks which one must avoid. **They are the symbol of spiritual death.** If under the Old Covenant, as well as in all cultures, leprosy is considered as a cause for social exclusion, is that it is truly the symbol of sin, the breaking of all communion. This is spiritual death. In Adam, it's also ours, as long as we have not encountered the risen Christ. Jesus requests the ten Lepers to go and show themselves to the priest. This is the only story where Jesus, instead of welcoming and touch the Lepers, sends them away! He orders them to report to the priest. This is the application the law of the Old Covenant. Along the way, all ten find that their leprosy disappeared. They obeyed the command of Jesus, they had faith in His Word. Noting their recovered purity, one of the ten returns to Jesus while the nine others go to Jerusalem to do what the Law requires. A Stranger, rejected twice, returned to Jesus as soon as he realized that his leprosy disappeared. He wants to thank his Benefactor.

The Book of Kings tells the epic of Naaman. There are no long he was at the head of the band of Syrians who raided Israel, destroying crops, taking captives. Among them, a little girl snatched from her parents in Israel. Now she is the slave of Mrs. Naaman. But Naaman of leprosy. The little slave has compassion for his masters and demonstrates his faith. And now the General returns to Israel, bearing gifts for the king of Samaria delivers him from his leprosy. Arriving at the house of the prophet Elisha, it does not even deign to come out to welcome him. This is Géhasi his servant who comes to tell him what to do: Go to dip seven times in the Jordan. He is annoyed and wants to return to Syria. Fortunately, his servants convinced him to try anyway, since he came all this way. He finally gave in and we know that his act of obedience is to be cleansed him. The prophet refuses to accept the gifts he brought. Faced with this repeated refusal, it was he who asked to receive something: Some earth from Israel, a charge of two mules. He recognizes that the God of Elisha is the only true God. Now he chose to worship Him alone.

Leprosy Mission is in Nepal for about sixty years. Even though any Christian presence was prohibited in the country, the authorities agreed that our Mission could care for people affected by leprosy. Many, during these six decades, when the Mission cared for these excluded people, were exposed to the Christian faith and their lives have been transformed. Physically, many are living "with sad handicaps," but they are now faithful Witnesses, Evangelists and Pastors.

God uses the weak and useless things of this world to do His work. The people to whom we go in the Name of Jesus are a powerful demonstration of that Truth. Sin made each of us a "Leper". As Sinners, we were dead, but thanks be to Jesus Christ, through Him we are made alive. Let us not be afraid to witness for Jesus. It is the weak that God wants to transform the lives of those lost around us.



The Word

We're following the theme of "*The Word of God - the Bible*". May we allow the words of **The Bible** to touch your hearts and change our ways to make us more like Jesus!

We'll continue our very brief overview of Psalm 119 which has great insights and responses to what **The Word, God's Word** means to us, has for us. Let's explore it together.

*Psalm 119:17-24 Gimlet "Be good to your servant while I live, that I may **obey your word**.*

Two very important words spring out to me: *servant and obey*.

Servant indicates relationship, it's out of our relationship with our Lord and saviour Jesus. From there it's so easy to obey. We serve our God because of His goodness, "*the goodness of God leads to repentance*". Can I add, **obedience**?

*Open my eyes that I may see **wonderful things in your law**.*

The Bible is a spiritual book! An unregenerate mind can not understand it! But through a relationship with our Heavenly Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit the living and abiding life of God, the Bible truths become real to us. Holy Spirit please make The Word alive that I may understand the wonderful things you have in **your law**.

*I am a stranger on earth; do not hide **your commands** from me.*

What an understanding of who we really are "strangers on earth"! I'm not an earthling but a heavenling! **His commands** are our so directive and instructive.

*My soul is consumed with longing for **your laws** at all times.*

So often blessings are related to what we have and get but as we read through The Bible biblical blessings take on a deeper meaning: Blessed are those who mourn, ...who hunger and thirst, ...who are merciful, ...who are persecuted for righteousness sake... Being consumed longing for **God's laws!**

*You rebuke the arrogant, who are accursed, those who stray from **your commands**.*

It so dangerous straying from The Bible, it breeds arrogance, can I add pride, selfishness...

*Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep **your statutes**.*

Obeing the **statutes** of the Lord are putrefying to me.

*Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on **your decrees**.*

Let it be know that your Christian stand is against the standards of this world, you will be ridiculed for the way you view and live life according to **God's decrees**.

***Your statutes** are my delight; they are my counsellors."*

The statutes of God should bring great pleasure to us and be the plum line to all our life decisions.

God bless you until He returns: Maranatha!



Care of Parents

“ I would rather die than be a burden to my family!” said a well-known actress in the context of the assisted suicide bill being debated in the UK Parliament recently. She and many people in our twenty-first century English society seem to assume that whenever a parent is ill or disabled, the “care” to be given to him or her will be an onerous duty, an unwelcome extra load of work which would be reluctantly undertaken (unless one decides to grudgingly pay someone else to do it). In contrast, Thomas Hardy described in one of his novels the joy and satisfaction mutually experienced by a young lady and her frail elderly father as she lovingly tended him until his demise.

While working abroad with TLM, many times I was amazed and humbled to see the way adults (often very young people) willingly took care of their parents who were disabled with leprosy. In “leprosy slums” one saw healthy educated youngsters choosing to remain where they had grown up (not taking up opportunities to move out into wider society and “escape from stigmatisation”), simply because they wished to continue looking after their elderly disabled parents- and sometimes also disabled grandparents. “How could I leave them?” was a question I heard often from a puzzled son or daughter when asked about “moving on”. In leprosy hospitals I saw more than once, a healthy son taking unpaid leave from his usual job to stay at the bedside of his helpless father, tending to the every need of the elderly person. Or an adult daughter relinquishing her chances of marriage & a home of her own to stay in a lonely place with an elderly parent who was unwelcome in the village because of his/her leprosy-related disability.

While working in British general practice for a few years, I saw elderly physically unfit men & women cheerfully struggling to minister to the needs of even older relatives suffering dementia, although the invalids were beyond recognising the effort expended to keep them safe and comfortable, and showed no appreciation.

In the Bible I searched for examples and comments on this matter: we recall young Ruth loyally supporting her elderly (and foreign) mother in law, earning for her, cooking for her, giving companionship (**Ruth ch 1,2**); I wondered about the widow of Nain (**Luke ch7, v11-16**) - had the dead man been her sole “carer” and did that influence Jesus’ decision to intervene on her behalf? Our Lord criticises those who would avoid giving material aid to needy parents on the pretext of giving to a “holy “ cause (**Matthew ch 15, v3-6**); at the end of His life (with much else to think on), he arranged for care of His mother (**Matthew ch 19, v26-27**). Solomon warns us “**do not despise your mother when she is old**” (**Prov ch 23,v22**) - I am sure he understood that the commandment “honour your father and your mother”(**Exodus ch 20, v12**) would include giving them the practical daily assistance they need to maintain their health and dignity in old age, it is not only about obedience and speaking respectfully about them to others.

When I was leaving Bangladesh in 2007, several times local colleagues and even patients said things like “please do not go away, we need you here”, but when I replied “since mother died my elderly father is alone at home and his vision is poor and that is why I am going - to live with him”, the Bangladeshis easily understood and responded “oh, in that case, if your father needs you, you must go”. They considered a family responsibility could take priority over one’s employment. After my father died, a cousin wrote to me “it takes time to move on after looking after a loved one. What a privilege it is though and worth the heartache! That ‘s what I felt about having Mum with us in her last year of life”. To care for a sick or disabled relative is a natural thing to do. A thing which may be seen as a privilege. A thing which is inherently worthwhile, and never a wasted effort, even if the one cared for cannot show any appreciation. It may be tiring, it may feel futile, it may be a thankless task, but it can only be a “burden” if it is perceived as an imposition and done mechanically without love for the person who receives care.

Dr. Cynthia Ruth Butlin, known as Ruth.

British (63). My service with TLM is as follows: 1981- 1982: sponsored by TLM for 1 academic year at All Nations Christian College in Hertfordshire, UK. 6 weeks of linguistics course. 1982- 1991: Medical officer at Richardson Leprosy Hospital Miraj, in India, under Dr PD Samson. 1991- 2001: medical superintendent at Anandaban Leprosy hospital in Nepal. March - June 2001: Furlough. June 2001- 2003: Superintendent Purulia leprosy hospital and homes, West Bengal in India. 2003- 2007: Medical advisor at DBLM (hospital and field programme), Nilphamari, Bangladesh (then ended my time as expatriate staff). 2007-now Voluntary speaker for TLM EW. 2013- now, skilled volunteer, sponsored by TLM EW, mainly working for DBLM hospital and rural health programmes in Bangladesh (also some work for TLM Nepal



My Good Shepherd

In Psalms My Good Shepherd Draws Me Close and Listens for My Voice

Shepherds still travel with their flocks across the arid landscape of Israel today. And just like the shepherds of old, today's shepherds know their sheep. They know what scares them; they know when just one of the flock wanders off.

They guide and protect them because they are theirs.

David called the Lord "our Shepherd" because we are God's sheep.

We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. — Psalm 95:7 NKJV, he wrote.

And just like sheep we, too, need a shepherd to guide us and protect us. Without God's guidance, we wander and get caught in the thistles of life. If He doesn't lead us beside still waters, we will get spiritually dry and worn out. If He leaves us alone, the wolves of lies and evil will pounce on us and devour our faith and confidence.

God is the Good Shepherd — your Good Shepherd who draws you close and watches over you. He invites you to lie down in green pastures; He refreshes your soul and guides you along the right paths.

And even the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death doesn't have to frighten you because God doesn't ever leave you.

I will not be afraid, the Psalmist sang, for You are close beside me. — Psalm 23:4 NLT

Your Good Shepherd sees your tears and listens for your voice. Again, David cried, *You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; You encourage them, and You listen to their cry. — Psalm 10:17*

Let your Good Shepherd carry you today through the valleys or the victories. As you walk with Him, talk with Him. He knows you and loves you and hears you, and He wants *His goodness and love [to] follow [you] all the days of [your] life. — Psalm 23:6.*

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More Precious than Rubies

In Proverbs God offers me wisdom more precious than rubies.

The God of the universe calls you His own, His beloved child. And your heavenly Father has riches and wealth at His disposal. He could give you anything because nothing is too hard or too big for Him.

God could show you that He loves you by lavishing you with luxury, moving you into a new house, getting you out of debt, and making you a billionaire. But when God expresses His love to His child, he does it by offering you something far more valuable than gold, something more priceless than any precious gemstone. He gives you wisdom. Why? Because wisdom will *prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity*. — Proverbs 3:2.

If you become wise, you will be the one to benefit. — Proverbs 9:12 NLT

God could give you anything, but He chooses to give you wisdom.

Wisdom is knowledge, with the spiritual insight to judge what really matters. And it is yours for the asking!

Just as God gave Solomon a wise and *“discerning heart”* (1 Kings 3:9) when he asked for it, God is leaning over the edge of heaven even now, listening for your request, just waiting to fill your heart with wisdom too. So if you lack wisdom, *ask of God, who gives to all liberally* — James 1:5.

God gives His most precious and valuable gifts to His children. That is ultimately why He gave you Jesus — and Jesus is the *“wisdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:24).

Thank God today for loving you so much that He only gives you the very best gifts — including that gift that is more precious than rubies.

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. — Proverbs 3:13–15 ESV

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The lifeblood of our work

John 6:5-15

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages^[a] to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. John 6, 5-15

One of my great joys in working for The Leprosy Mission is the opportunity to serve alongside a dedicated and committed army of volunteers who seek to follow the example of Jesus Christ in reaching out and doing what they can to help cure, care for and restore people affected by leprosy.

Volunteers come in all shapes and sizes – Board trustees, office helpers, medical electives, prayer warriors, church representatives, fundraising champions and many more. They are a varied and diverse bunch of people yet all similar in their determination and passion to help make a difference where and when they can. In the face of great need these volunteers enable the heart of Jesus, His compassion & care, to be shown to those affected by leprosy.

Like the young boy who gave all that he had in our Gospel story today I so often see volunteers give all that they have. They often feel like 'it isn't much' and wonder what real difference their small contribution can make. Yet as they offer their time, prayers and money Jesus blesses these small acts and creates transformed lives as a result.

Miracles still happen today as individuals, families and communities are healed and restored when we offer Jesus all that we have.

Volunteers are the life blood of our work. We simply couldn't do what we do without them. Let us give thanks today for the thousands of volunteers who give, pray and work for those affected by leprosy. May God bless each of them richly.

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever does' (Margaret Mead)

Joanne Briggs,

National Director The Leprosy Mission Northern Ireland



Under my umbrella...

Ephesians 6

Do you own an umbrella?

Take a moment to share with each other if you own one, and if so what it looks like!

Next question, why do you have an umbrella?

Take a moment to discuss!

Of course, you have an umbrella to protect yourself against the rain. It acts as a kind of giant hood, or upright shield. In Northern Ireland, we all own umbrellas, because rain is a daily part of life. Imagine how silly I felt when I forgot to pack our umbrella's as we went on a family day trip to an outdoor centre called Crom Estate. We did have our coats, and even though it was a showery day, decided to 'made the most of it', enjoying a walk around old ruined castle, exploring some islands, all the while dodging showers. To finish the day, we hired a row boat, and set off to explore around the lakes. On our way back, it started to chuck it down like two men and a wee lad (which is a colloquial term which means it rained very heavily).

I was in a shorts and t shirt, but did have a big coat with me. I got our two little girls to hunker down, and I put the coat over them, acting as a type of umbrella. I got totally soaked while they stayed dry, much to their amusement!

In Ephesians 6 we read about the armour of God. if you have time, take a moment to read Ephesians 6:10-18. The verse I want to focus on though is verse 16, which reads:

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Today, we might find it hard to imagine what Paul has in mind as he writes this – the picture of a Roman soldier, with a giant shield that he could crouch behind to protect himself from arrows, but we might find it easy to think of the umbrella, or a giant coat, covering over us and protecting us from the storm.

Pete Greig, the founder of 24/7 Prayer tells the story of a lady who felt God telling her that there was going to be bloodshed at the upcoming Superbowl. She got a group of people to go to the Superbowl car park and pray the evening before the game. The event went off peacefully, and it was only much later that she discovered that a man, bent on a killing spree had arrived at the car park of the Superbowl, armed and ready to act, when he had a sudden, inexplicable, change of heart, and turned himself into the police!

The shield of faith protected a whole stadium full of people that day, and it protects us from so many of the attacks of the enemy, often without us knowing anything about them. So today, let us join together in prayer and hold the shield of faith over the global fellowship of TLM, and over the people of faith in each country that we represent.

Peter Hilton - Church and School Engagement Officer, TLM Northern Ireland



The Shepherd

Psalm 23

Early, this morning of November, it is cold. It is raining. In a field, close to a forest, a flock of sheep grazes quietly under the friendly guarding of a shepherd. In the comfort, in my car, I have a thought of admiration for this shepherd. He spent all night long in the middle of his herd. He watches over them. He assures their protection. He looks after those who are sick. He knows his sheep, those who are the most vulnerable and need a particular care. Without love, the shepherd would not be able to do correctly his work. Thanks to his protective love, ewes have no fear. They let lead.

This situation which takes place under my eyes becomes more and more rare by us. It reminds me several biblical texts related to shepherds and ewe. We know all the parabola of the good shepherd and the lost sheep. On the other hand, we know less the prophecy of Ezekiel which we can read in the chapter 34, on the judgment of the unfaithful shepherds, those who have an authority on others and who make an excessive use of it in their profit.

“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally... For this what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them...I will tend them in a good pasture...

In a few weeks time we will celebrate Christmas. May we find courage and strength in He who has come as our good shepherd.

Eric Chollet

I'm retired since three 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.



The Light of the World - Advent

John 8:12:

I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.

When I was a child I was very fearful of the dark. It was during the war years, so black out had to be observed by everyone, and the darkness seemed very dark indeed. When the war was over and the lights were back on in the streets, we were very happy, especially when Christmas came. I still enjoy seeing the Christmas lights. We have a conservatory on the back of our house, and this is decorated with many lights over the Christmas period. When evening comes we put the lights on and see not only them but the reflection of them all around the garden. It is quite a sight!

Some of the stories of the first Christmas in the Gospels tells us of some of the lights that shone. There are the shepherds guarding their sheep in the fields at night, and they became very afraid as an angel appeared to give them the wonderful news that a Saviour was born. Then the angel was joined by a heavenly host and the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were told not to be afraid, and their fear was replaced by joy when they went to see and worship the Baby in the rough simplicity of the stable.

Another light was that new bright star seen by the wise men from the east, and followed it all the way to Bethlehem where it stopped over the place where Jesus was. They too rejoiced, worshipped and offered gifts, before they went on their way.

The most wonderful light of all was Jesus Himself, the Light of the world who came to bring light to our hearts. John 1:4-5 says in Him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot put it out. What an amazing truth!

Then in Matthew 5:16 we are told to let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

I remember when I was working in Lhuntse in Bhutan we had to use kerosene lamps or candles as there was no electricity, and before we had a generator. One day I had to go to Mongar Hospital which was about four days walk. When I arrived it was getting dark and I went into one of the houses to unload my bedding, and first of all looked for a torch. Suddenly I heard the voice of a Finnish colleague telling me to switch on the light, why was I walking around in the dark! I had forgotten they were blessed with electricity and had become used to my torch and less light!

Rev 21:23 tells us that in the new Jerusalem there is no need of sun or moon to shine in it for Gods glory illumines it. The Lamb is its light.

So let us walk in the Light, whether it is in the dark winter days like UK or in the summer sunshine of other parts of the world.

Mollie Clark.

Worked with TLM for 8 years in Purulia, 18 years in four places in Bhutan, and 8 years in the International office as director for Personnel.



Is anything too hard for the Lord?

Genesis 18:14 *“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”*

I will return to you as an appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

Job 38:36 *“Who gives wisdom to the heart and instinct to the mind?” (paraphrased).*

The following is adapted from a devotional book called “Hearing His Voice” by Chris Tiegreen.

Many of us will have said this prayer: *“Lord, I don’t know how to deal with this.*

Please give me an ideas / wisdom / courage to know what to do.”

I can’t think of a time when God doesn’t answer in one way or another: Directly with an idea, through the advice of a friend or mentor, or even through my sub-conscious mind as I sleep.

Why do we doubt that God will answer? Why wouldn’t he? God is the God of answers.

He is the God of creation. No problem exists for which He does not already have a solution.

He put His truth inside us. He gave us a conscience. He gave us instincts and gut-reactions. He wants us to remain sensitive to Him. The idea may not come as a concrete message from a divine voice, but when we suddenly have a spark of creativity after praying that prayer, it’s from Him. We didn’t just suddenly become brilliant! He inspired us. Our thoughts are guided by His Holy Spirit if we ask Him to guide us. If we are immersing ourselves in His Word and His ways, we learn to think like Him.

Think about the implications for TLM: In a moment, God could solve our financial crisis; or give clarity on a policy issue; he could heal any staff or family dysfunction; he could resolve any conflict between or within our members. He could overcome the leprosy disease, or the social problems, poverty and stigma experienced by people affected by leprosy.

He has all the answers. Perhaps he is simple waiting for His people to ask Him for guidance and direction?

What would happen if every Christian educator, every Christian politician, every Christian voice in media, every believer in the arena of society began asking God for divine solutions to human problems? What creativity would fill the body of Christ? What ideas would suddenly come into mind in the middle of the night or to a wandering mind sitting in traffic, on the train or going for a walk?

What if the recipients of these divine ideas remembered to give God the credit for them, rather than taking the credit for themselves? What blessings would God give us to offer the world?

There is no reason not to ask. God’s people should be the most creative and ingenious people on the planet – simply because we know the God of all solutions. When we stop struggling and start asking, God will very often give us the answer.

Lord, we need Your creativity, Your answers, Your ingenuity. Inspire us with Your brilliance, and just like Joseph and Daniel, let us gladly tell people about the God who reveals mysteries.



“Should I lift up my eyes to the hills?”

Psalm 121

My first job was less than a mile away from the South Downs in Southern England, so I looked up to see their outline at around 200 metres. I was always reminded of the opening line of a beautiful Psalm, *“I lift up my eyes to the hills; where does my help come from?”* It’s a Song of Ascents, sung on the way up to the Jerusalem Temple; a Psalm of praise, assurance, confidence in God, -ever present, always watching, protective.

I am no Hebrew expert, but I once heard it said that the *whole* verse could be a question: *“Should I lift up my eyes to the hills? Where does my help come from?”*

In Ancient Near Eastern beliefs, as in other cultures, ‘gods’ were thought to be located on hilltops. So amidst threatening enemies and acute awareness of their gods, the Psalmist asks: *“Should I lift up my eyes to the hills [like they do?]; where does **my** help come from?”* He answers with an emphatic *“No! **My** help comes from the LORD...”* The Psalm contrasts the true God with the lifeless, powerless pagan deities and idols haunting the hills -and the minds- around.

The Psalm challenges our cultures too. *‘Should I lift up my eyes to the ‘hills’ of today’s false gods?’* Many of TLM’s family are in multi-racial, multi-faith societies; ‘post-Christian’ societies, where people choose whether and what to believe; which ‘hills’ to lift their eyes to. For others, society and culture may be dominated by other faiths and ideologies, other ‘hills’ to look up to.

So the Psalmist’s question remains relevant, *“Should I lift up my eyes to all these, -like others do? Where does **my** help come from, to comfort my soul and feed my mind?”* Does it come from other faiths, or man-made ‘gods’? “No!” says the Psalmist. Five times he says God watches over us: vv 3,4,5,7, 8. He will not let our foot slip (v.3); he is our shade, day and night (vv 5-6); he will keep us from all harm (vv 6-7); he watches over us, now and for ever. (v.8)

The background of the Psalm is that life for God’s child is not problem-free. We need help in grim circumstances, illness, family problem, financial difficulty or leprosy-affected life. If ‘help’ is merely in human, physical, here-and-now terms, we will be troubled. Illnesses don’t all go, troubles don’t all melt away, death comes to us all. But perhaps the hint lies in those last few words: *“now and for evermore”*.

Our loving Father watches over us in both temporal and eternal terms; his everlasting arms beneath us and ever watchful gaze over us are just that... *everlasting*; and whilst not all of heaven can be brought into earth now, some can, and ultimately our earthly pain and darkness will melt into his heaven’s light, -in his good time. Meanwhile, a trusting relationship with him will be our present ‘help’ and future hope. And thus his love in and through us, will shine more brightly than any of the tawdry lights on the hilltops of the world.

May God indeed watch over you, now and for evermore.

David Beazley - David is the minister of Sainthill Baptist Church, in SW England. A former member of the Board of TLM England and Wales, he remains involved as a volunteer speaker for the Mission, and after long involvement with TLM International, he chairs one of the International Working Groups.



A Pilgrim's Song

Reading: Psalm 121

When we look at Psalm 121 more closely, we can picture Jerusalem almost visible to the pilgrim, notched somewhere on the skyline on Judea's topmost ridge. This being one of the fifteen Songs of Ascent, the "songs of going up" were a vital part of the pilgrimage of God's people as they travelled through dangers and faced the difficult realities of life. To be in Jerusalem is the goal of the returning exile or pilgrim.

The psalm is written in the style of a dialogue, with elements of confession and assurance included. The dialogue may be in the heart of a single person (like the words repeated in Psalms 42 and 43 "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God.") Or it may be a part of the discussion amongst fellow-pilgrims. Only God's protection has brought them safe thus far in their journey. The psalm consists of four couplets, each starting with an introduction, which is then developed in the second verse:

- Couplet 1 (verses 1-2) – Confession of trust in the Lord
- Couplet 2 (verses 3-4) – Assurance of a Guardian who never sleeps or slumbers
- Couplet 3 (verses 5-6) – Assurance of God's unfailing protection
- Couplet 4 (verses 7-8) – Assurance of God's involvement in all of life

Many religions value the term pilgrimage. It is often seen as a journey to sacred places inspired by religious devotion. Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims all have their holy places. The Jews, Arabs and Palestinians have conflicting interests in and claims on Jerusalem.

Psalm 121 is also a pilgrim song to the Christian believer – describing the reality of the journey through life. It helps us to confess our faith in our Lord, while being surrounded by a broken world keen on self-destruction. God is indeed our Helper who assures us of his protection even in the worst of life's situations.

Christian pilgrims are sometimes faced with the reality of loneliness. They need to grow in personal trust and in their relationship with the Lord. They sometimes struggle in prayer, battle to hear God's voice or know that they have let their Master down. It may seem like a desert experience, seeking to reach the oasis of blessing and the reality of God's promises. Their ultimate goal is to reach and enjoy God's presence forever in heaven.

Christian pilgrims also know the joy of community and fellowship with fellow-pilgrims. What a joy and relief to discover that one is not alone on this pilgrimage! Together we realise that we are on the move, never stationary, ever-changing to be like Christ in the world and seeking to bring others to a personal faith in Him.



Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Apostle Paul	1 and 2 Nov		Genesis 18,14	28 November
Dan Izzett	20 November		2 Sam 7,12	14 November
David Beazley	29 November		2 Kings 5	19 November
Eddie Askew posthumus	13 November		Psalm 2	6 November
Eric Chollet	26 November		Psalm 23	26 November
Gareth Shrubsole	11 November		Psalm 27,4	12 November
Gordon Brown	3 November		Psalm 119,17-24	20 November
Jeffrey Tan	22,23 November		Psalm 121	29 and 30 Nov
Joanne Briggs	24 November		Proverbes 23,22	21 November
June Nash	14 November		Matth 5,16	18 November
Mo Lewis	4 November		Luke 10,33	13 November
Mollie Clark	27 November		Luke 17,11-19	19 November
Natalie Smith	28 November		John 6,5-15	24 November
Otto Kingsley	15,16 November		John 8,12	27 November
Paul and Niki Jakeman Dr	5 November		John 10,14	8 November
Paul du Plessis Dr	7,8,9,10 Nov		John 15,13	11 November
Peter Hilton	25 November		John 20,27	7 November
Peter Laubscher	12 November		John 21	17 November
Pierre Geiser	19 November		Rom 3,22-24	10 November
Piet Both Dr	18 November		Rom 12,1	9 November
Pradeep and Sarah Failbus	17 November		1 Cor 1,10	4 November
Ruth Butlin Dr	21 November		1 Cor 15	1 and 2 November
Theo de Villiers	30 November		Ephes 6	25 November
			Col 3,1-11	5 November
			James 2,14-26	3 November