



TLM Daily Devotions

December 2016 – mid-January 2017





“This is my story...” - appeal!

In this recent set Jo-Anne Thomson reflects on the beautiful hymn “Blessed assurance...” with the refrain: “This is my story...”

This, besides a reminder to ask myself: what is my story? - also became the inspiration to make a public appeal in The Bridge to everyone:

What is YOUR story, dear TLMer?

More specifically: let it be an invitation to everyone to share her/his story about how each one started with TLM?! For many of us our TLM-story started by a definite call through being inspired by someone, or a presentation, etc, to join TLM as volunteer, or supporter, or a staff member, or something else. For others the “story with TLM” started maybe through an announcement of a job they saw and they felt “on fire” about this being more than just a daily work.

**All the same: share Your story please: how you started with TLM, when, and by what means the Lord touched you, inspired you, gave fire to you to serve Him by serving leprosy affected people!
Share Your story: how did you get “infected” by our beloved TLM?!**

It would be wonderful if in the coming 2017 on the pages of The Bridge we might read many testimonies, personal messages, too, by sharing our own “stories”! I am sure these stories will mean blessing, will strengthen our fellowship and bring praise to the Lord!

No need to say: it is not an obligation, but an invitation. All other topics for devotionals are still most welcome! – this is maybe an additional and maybe a special opportunity to open your heart in a devotional with the motto: “This is my story...”.

Let us tell our stories! Greatly looking forward to receiving them!

Marta Risko



God cares for his children even when they make wrong decisions

We don't know many things about Jonah, the prophet. He is mentioned in 2 Kings 14.25 and of course in the book of Jonah where we can read one of his missions. Not the best one!

I wonder why we can read this true story. I'm sure it's not to power the polemics trying to explain which kind of fish could swallow a man; nor to condemn Jonah.

But it's because it's a sign as Jesus said in Matthew 12.38-40; and because we learn to know God better.

God is almighty

He sent a great wind on the sea, a violent storm (Jonah 1.4). He calmed the raging sea (Jonah 1.15). He provided a great fish to swallow Jonah (Jonah 1.17). He commanded the fish to reject Jonah (Jonah 2.10). God was present alongside Jonah, he did not abandon him.

-> **God is present by my side whatever the situation I face.**

God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love (Psalm 103.8-13)

Jonah knew God and he knew his Word (when he prayed he quoted the Psalms).

When Jonah has bottomed he prayed - he was convinced that God was going to deliver him:

I will look again toward your holy temple - Jonah 2.4 / But you brought my life up from the pit, O lord my God - Jonah 2.6

God gave a second chance and finally Jonah obeyed.

-> But for God what matters is more who we are than what we do (even what we do for him!) What he wants is that we can grow in the relationship we have with him.

If the mission was more important I think the text would stop at chapter 3 but we have chapter 4!

God transforms

God transforms negative situations for his glory: *the sailors greatly feared the Lord, they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him - Jonah 1.16*; the Ninevites were saved (Jonah 3.10).

But mostly he transformed Jonah little by little.

In chapter 4:

- Jonah is angry

His prophetic message was not fulfilled ("*Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.*" Jonah 3.4) - he loses all credibility; he can even be taken as a false prophet.

- Jonah does not understand God

God saved the Ninevites - the enemies of Israel who deserved to be judged.

His God is love but he is right! So how can he give up, refrain from doing justice?

God cared for Jonah - he listened to him despite the harsh words and helped Jonah to know him better.

-> *God cares for me:*

He is present by my side; he loves me

He is faithful, when I fall he raises me up and helps me to keep walking with him

He agrees to cooperate with me despite my failures

He wants our relationship progresses, he always draw me closer to him



Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalm 119:105

Why do we want as many Bibles in the hands of people? Why do we believe and trust God to provide us with His Word to give out and teach to others?

Could it be because in a world that is so full of darkness people need The Light to shine through? This portion of scripture from the “Word, the commandments, the law, the statutes, the decrees...” psalm brings Light in a dark world. Two directional light: at my feet so that I can see where I am walking and light to where I am going!

Psalm 119.17-24

The title to this portion is “Gimel” symbolizes a rich man running after a poor man, the next portion verses 25-32 are titled “Dalet”, to give him charity. So you need to connect the two portions together. They will come to you as separate thoughts.

Build this picture in your mind: “Gimel: a rich man running after a poor man” – Could we relate this to our Heavenly Father” wanting to give us His riches, wanting us to be more and more like Jesus.

*Verse 17 & 18 Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will **obey your word**. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in **your law**.*

Obedience has always been the key that unlocks whatever God has for us.

*1 Samuel 15.22-23 But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the **Lord**? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the **Lord**, he has rejected you as king.”*

*Verse 19-24 I am a stranger on earth; do not hide **your commands** from me. My soul is consumed with longing for **your laws** at all times. You rebuke the arrogant, who are cursed and who stray from **your commands**. Remove from me scorn and contempt, for **I keep your statutes**. Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will **meditate on your decrees**. **Your statutes** are my delight; they are my counsellors.*

It is accepted that King David wrote this Psalm and it seems as if there is a deep heartfelt and desire to **obey God and His Word**. Even with his enemies clamouring for him, slandering him he hid himself in **God’s Word!**

Wherever you are today, tomorrow, until Jesus comes; obey, hide inside and meditate on **His Word!**

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.



"Stewardship"

"... it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" I Corinthians 4:2

We are all familiar with the principle "Give a hungry man a fish and tomorrow he will be hungry again. Let him watch you catch fish and tomorrow he will forget. Do it with him until he is able to continue doing it on his own and he will be able to supply his own needs."

While this is a valid principle and reduces the risk of dependence, destruction of dignity or developing a "beggar mentality", it does not go far enough. The more efficient a people become at "fishing" the greater the risk that they will deplete the supply and condemn future generations to starvation.

The greatest challenge is to take people a step further and teach them how to replenish the fish supply.

Naturally this principle applies to various resources. For different reasons, large tracks of forest are being destroyed yearly. Burning trees for cooking, farming, fertilizing, etc. may be considered essential in some circumstances, but unless new trees are planted, the long-term effects will be disastrous. (Many parts of the Sahel which until recently were able to sustain substantial populations, have had to be abandoned and have become semi-desert because of indiscriminate deforestation.)

The Bible has much to say about principles for protecting the environment. We have been entrusted as steward of God's creation. He expects us to use the things He has placed at our disposal in a responsible way. Does my lifestyle reflect an understanding and respect of this principle?

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.



Zechariah's Song

⁶⁷ Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸ "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn^[c] of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David

⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

⁷¹ salvation from our enemies

and from the hand of all who hate us—

⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors

and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,

and to enable us to serve him without fear

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶ And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness

and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace."

(Luke 1, 67-79)



Unity - Part 1: Unity as Challenge

It is a plain cliché to say: we all are different. But as every cliché expresses reality, this one is also a basic truth about mankind. The eternal purpose of our Creator and Almighty Father was to bring into being a wonderful, amazingly colourful, never itself repeating world. As He is infinite, His wisdom and creativity is also infinite, has no end! No two leaves from a small branch, nor two eggs from the same chicken, no two grains of sand on the beach are identical ones! That is especially true too regarding the Creator's most precious work: man!

Diversity is a creation principle! *"What is man...." (Psalm 8...)* The variety, the uniqueness; these endlessly different elements which make up you or me as an individual cannot be expressed by words! We are not clones! But perfectly different, unique pieces! Just ask parents of seemingly identical twins about this! This amazement can be ours as well, anytime we just contemplate that God, demonstrating His infinite power, frameless fantasy and almighty tools created each one of us with even totally different palms of hands or fingerprints! God created each one of us according to his specific, personal and individual plans. *"you knit me together in my mother's womb...I was woven together ...Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139).* Are you enough amazed?

But this most holy and uniquely divine purpose became, too, a tool in the evil's hand. Creating sinful confrontation, adversity of the diversity, which had been the holy purpose of God in creation!

Human attempts on resolving differences and diversity primarily and automatically mean to put them aside, sweeping out the differences and annulling diversity.

- Union. Creating schematics, e.g. union where the purpose is to make 'one' of the many different ones according to set criteria, selection.
- Uniformity, Another evident way for avoiding diversity is creating uniformity. Let us make everybody possibly similar and everything similarly! – this is achieved by creating a common pattern. But this aim, too, creates in reality tension and even more diversity instead of unity! –
- Universality, the recent Western favourite. Saying: "let us each one give up all, lose face, identity, and let us be all new, having no common past, but a common future?"

Each one of these efforts and ideas fails. We experience it day by day in family, in church, in company, in mission, among sisters and brothers: everywhere. Tension remains, differences are rolling on, maybe lessened...but all the same!

Amidst all these, Jesus prays for the unity of his disciples! *John 17, 11*. If unity had been an evidence for the disciples of Jesus, what they could achieve of their own will and by their own means, the Lord would not have prayed for it! But He did! He knew and saw how the evil fuelled, even among the chosen disciples, sinful division, jealousy, concurrence, differences and adversity. He knew that 'they were not one', and that it is not the case for us either. All those who believe in Jesus, should be one. He did not even say that „they will be” – as something promising what might be achieved by training, exercises, deeds or thoughts. But He begged, suffered in His last hours in front of the Father with His desire: 'they MAY BE one'! This "may be" expresses the innermost pain of the heart of the Lord Jesus, that unity of His disciples was even for Him a desire.

If unity was a prayer for Jesus, it should be also for us!

If the unity of His disciples was a concern for Jesus, it should be the same for us! Unity is a challenge!

Marta Risko – country leader TLMHungary

(First block of devotional session of the Spiritual Ministry MAWG on the Members Meeting of TLMGF, Lane End, Sept 2016)



UNITY – Part 2: Unity as mystery

“All the believers were together and had everything in common.” Acts 2: 44

Unity is one of the main themes in NT. The devil always divides, this is his specialty from the Garden of Eden all through history. The Lord unites, this is his specialty all through the Bible and the history of mankind.

Paul’s letter to Ephesians could be called “the letter of unity” and speaks a lot about real, spiritual and genuine fellowship and unity. In this specific letter Paul gives us some beautiful and strong pictures in order to help us understand what unity is:

1. A family (Eph 5:1).

- We belong to a family with the same father. We are God’s children, brothers and sisters, and we keep together even though we sometimes disagree
- After a romantic period of just two persons, the young couple receives a baby. Suddenly the baby is king and decides everything and the parents have to adjust to the smallest and weakest one in the family.

2. A building (Eph 2:20-21), “we are living stones” build together to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. We are many stones, but one building, a temple: the place where the glory of God was, a place for worship, prayer and offering. Each piece of stone is needed, none can be neglected. Each has a specific, unique role in the whole.

3. A body (Eph 4:15-16), we have the same spiritual DNA and are perfectly united:

- Not as an organization, but as an organism. All working together for the same purpose: life!
- Christ is the head, see Paul’s teaching about the body 1 Cor 12, many parts but one body: *“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

4. A marriage (Eph 5:31-32), *“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate”* (Math 19:6). We are and remain different. But perfectly united in love, the same differences are transforming from dividing to uniting forces, from competing to completing.

5. A citizenship (Eph 2:19). We are citizens of God’s kingdom with civic rights and responsibilities and the same passport.

6. An army (Eph 6:10-12), No soldier fights for himself alone but together in an army. We have one commander in Chief and we keep together as an army.

- Protecting and supporting each other, fighting a common enemy. We are confident that we will overcome
- An army keeps together. The enemy’s strategy is often to scatter the hostile army, then it’s easier to fight them

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” We don’t have to create unity, it’s already done by Jesus on the cross (Eph 2:14) by the Holy Spirit. Our task it’s to keep, preserve and maintain what God already has done. To keep unity requires:

- The Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit there is no authentic unity. We really need the Holy Spirit
- An effort from everyone
- The bond of peace. We share a genuine, deep unity, not a superficial or cosmetic one

This is impossible for man. But possible with God! Unity is a mystery!

Allan Ekstedt – country leader, TLM Sweden

(Second block of devotional session of the Spiritual Ministry MAWG on the Members Meeting of TLMGF, Lane End, Sept 2016)



Unity - Part 3 – The Triumph of Love over Diversity

Our colourful and infinitely various world and mankind is the creation-principle of our Creator! Jesus never tried to erase the diversity of His disciples either! He recognised it and treated each of them in a differentiated way, suited to that very person! He tailored the superego of Peter all the time. But He encouraged the shy Thomas. He warned Judas in advance, but He let John to express his affection and he lay on Jesus' breast. He treated each one in a unique way instead of putting them into similar sized boxes and press them until they did not become similar ones. He did this, simply because He loved them, loved them until death!

In the meantime our Creator demonstrated His will on oneness though the mystery of the covenant. He vanquished the greatest ever gap of difference: His perfect holiness and mankind's sinfulness, by His covenant, this mysterious relationship, a bridge over brokenness! He did it not in a legal term: as agreement of two or more equal partners, but as a love-term: a totally unequal, in legal sense fully „unjust“ decision! *“The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD loved you...” (Deut 7,7)* Unity is built upon God's covenant love, accomplished on Calvary!

Therefore unity is a covenant principle! When we adapted the first sentence of the TLM Fellowship Charter (“covenant relationship”) this same purpose had been before our eyes. Despite differences and unresolvable inequalities in size, strength, environment, capacity, traditions: we still wanted to demonstrate being of One Body, belonging to the One God of Covenant and to each other! Therefore the rule may not be for us other as was that of Augustinus in the 4-5th century: *“In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus aute charitas!”* *Unity in the necessary ones, liberty in the questionable ones, and above all: love!*

The favourite church to my heart is an “église” from the 13th century, in the Mid-Western part of France, one of those 12-13-14th century beauties which were built on the Road of Pilgrimage leading to Santiago de Compostella in Spain, crossing France. Offering rest and silence for the multiplying crowds of pilgrims, village by village magnificent churches were built, giving some of the brightest pages of European medieval church architecture. We can imagine the revitalisation of the believers of those villages in the 12-14th centuries: “If they (the neighbours) payed X well-known stone graving master, we will pay the more expensive Y one!” (People in all times are similar... pious people in zeal to the Lord, too!) But this church I have been amazed about, was an exception. Around the main entrance, where normally a continuously decorated arch was put together of the pieces of stones, on this one each piece is different! One graved by a talent, the next one to it: a very simple design. One by a potential “future Michelangelo”, the next one to it just something simple. – Amazed by the sight, I tried to find out the reason behind: seemingly the land owner had not invited well-known stone engravers of “quality assurance purpose”. But he made an appeal to every man in the village, having zeal to engrave one piece of stone for the main entrance, without selection! Everyone was given a hammer and a burin (engraving tool) and a piece of stone. And each one of them completed it according to their own talent. Just one thing was common in each one of them: the burning desire to build a church! And they did! It has been proclaiming the glory and triumph of God for centuries,

Unity is the triumph of love over diversity and differencies!

Marta Risko – country leader, TLM Hungary

(Third block of devotional session of the Spiritual Ministry MAWG on the Members Meeting of TLMGF, Lane End, Sept 2016)



UNITY – Part 4: Unity as Miracle

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one — I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” John 17:20-23

It's touching to read about the very last evening of Jesus and his disciples together. After three years of intense fellowship Jesus gave them a last teaching for the future. After the teaching Jesus started to pray a prayer full of emotions and prophetic insights. He prayed for divine protection for his disciples in all generations and for their unity. He foresaw what a challenge and danger the attacks of the evil in all times will be until mankind exists, to poison the God-given diversity, and create adversity instead.

Unity is an answer of the prayer of Jesus. God is right now and in every time answering this prayer by uniting his church through the Holy Spirit. Unity is God's will and expressed wishes for his disciples in all generations. We never can achieve it by our own will or decision, neither the church can by any effort. It is purely the work of the Holy Spirit, power of God, most desired wish of the Lord Jesus.

Unity is about the glory of God *“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one”*. Our unity brings God's glory to our lives, our fellowship and our work. That's why it's so important to have *“unity in the necessary ones, liberty in the questionable ones, and above all: love!”* (Augustinus)

Unity is a channel for God's love to the world: *“I have loved them even as you have loved me.”* United we are able to show God's love and blessings to our generation. In the 2nd century a Christian writer described the amazement of pagans on Christian behaviour: *“Look, how they love each other!”*

Unity is the sign to the world that Jesus was sent by God *“Then the world will know that you sent me”*. In a world full of divisions and brokenness our unity though Jesus will be the strongest witness of Jesus as God's Son and God's salvation.

Unity is a real miracle, only possible by God's grace and the Holy Spirit. *“The acts of the flesh are obvious: .. idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.” Gal. 5:19-22*

Let's be ready for God's miracle!

*Refrain: Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, With cords that cannot be broken
Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, Bind us together in Love.*

There is only one God, there is only one King
There is only one Body, that is why we sing. *Refr.*

Fit for the glory of God, purchased by His precious Blood
Born with the right to be free, Jesus the victory has won. *Refr.*

We are the family of God, we are the promise divine
We are God's chosen desire, we are the glorious new wine. *Refr.*

Allan Ekstedt – country leader, TLM Sweden

(Fourth block of devotional session of the Spiritual Ministry MAWG on the Members Meeting of TLMGF, Lane End, Sept 2016)



The Way, the Truth and the Life

John 14

Many international people first come to our Christian hospital in Thailand only after they have died. Their friends come too, for the funerals. We encourage them to share about the life of the deceased. It is fascinating to hear about their different experiences and achievements in life- the fastest runner of the 1500 metres in America in his time, or a man who worked on the Apollo spacecraft, a famous concert pianist. Having talked confidently about their friends' past, many people then less confidently express some hope about their friend's present and future. On that day everyone seems a little less dismissive of God. They seem to want to hope there is someone waiting beyond death.

I love to share Jesus' words from John 14 with folk on that day of uncertainty. Yes, we have uncertainty. No, we don't have all the knowledge and the answers. But we have the Lord Jesus saying we can know Him and He has gone and prepared a place for us and will take us to Himself. The certainty comes from knowing Him first, here and now. And as we grow in knowing Him we grow in peaceful assurance that all our life and future is safe in His hands. We don't need to ask to see a map of the way ahead. **He is** the way, and the truth, and the life.

It reminds me of when our children were little and could not swim, and feared the deep end of the pool ..until their daddy was swimming there. Then when he called them to come and join him there was no hesitation. They leapt in. They had no confidence in their ability to swim, but every confidence they would be safe. Daddy was there. He had gone ahead. He was waiting. He was inviting them to trust him. They believed in him.

In John 14 Peter, Thomas, Philip and Judas were all asking the questions, and all responded in their different ways. But these words of Jesus can give us assurance not only for the future uncertainties of life and death. But they also lead on to the amazing promise. *"Truly I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works that these will he do because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."*

For the challenges ahead in our lives and works, for the ultimate challenges of ending this life well, for these we can know Jesus and have the security of His promises.

Heather Smith is deputy director of McKean Rehabilitation Center, Chiang Mai Thailand.



When veils are swallowed

The view of False Bay from my home is ever-changing.

My favourite views occur during the very infrequent windless days of autumn and spring, when alternating layers of warm and cold air over the water produce mesmerising mirages.

The first sign of a mirage is when the mountain peaks develop flat, anvil-like heads. A village, nestling at the base of the mountains, is transformed into a mini-Manhattan as multiple images of the beach cottages are stacked above each other, creating the illusion of a city packed with skyscrapers on the shore. With good reason, the people of Sicily know this effect as a *Fata Morgana*, "Fairy Castle."

At the end of the mountain range, the mirage creates a bridge, as the inverted image of the sloping hill juts out over the sea below it. If you point a telescope under the arch of the 'bridge', you'll find a lighthouse, normally hidden beyond the horizon, floating in the sky, an inverted image of itself soaring above it. As the mirage intensifies and weakens, the two images drift apart and then glide towards each other, coalescing to form a huge "mast".

All too soon, the mirage collapses as the wind intensifies. Cities, aqueducts and lighthouses disappear as the veil of the mirage is stripped away.

"And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations." Isaiah 25:7

We know that the veil was removed by Christ, echoed by the rending of the temple curtain, torn in two from top to bottom, demonstrating Divine intervention rather than human action that might have been implied had it been rent from the bottom up. We also know that Isaiah was speaking of an event yet to take place, when the veil of death would be removed: "... then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory'."

Mirages are fascinating, but they are an illusion, disappearing in a puff of wind. The Holy Spirit too will blow through this world, dispelling everything that is without substance and unveiling that which is immortal. Sadly, this world is often pre-occupied with the illusory, rather than the eternal.

During your devotions today, you may wish to look at some of the texts where the Scriptures refer to veils and unveiling – you'll find several in the letters to the Corinthian church.

"Lord, help me today to look beyond the veils of this world – the things that clamour for my attention, and yet which pass so swiftly, leaving no permanent memorial."

May you know His peace and joy as you go about the work of Eternity today.

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



Comfort for God's People

Isaiah 40

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD^[a];
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.^[b]

⁴ Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out."
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the LORD blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever."

⁹ You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,^[c]
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"



Mary - 1.

Luke 1, 26- 38 King James Version

I like Mary, the mother of Jesus. I am thankful for her being part of the Holy Scripture as she is: a simple, everyday-person, fully standing on the ground of Nazareth, but in the meantime becoming a precious tool in the Almighty's hands. Her example is so often a help for me in completing my call while still living here amidst so many challenges, weaknesses, temptations.

I like Mary as a teenager. Yes, she by then, receiving the most holy message a human being ever might receive was maybe 15? Compare the task and the importance of what she had to cope with, with our overprotected-over-spoiled teenagers' ones! Can you imagine, what she might feel? In her small darkish room, an angel, and with such a message? Completely disturbing, surrealistic and fearful!

I like her brave reaction. Mary was a clever young girl! She had bravely used her brain! Instead of collapsing, or crying hysterically and running away: she with the cool head of an intellectual wants to *understand* the message! „*How can this be...?*” – Each discovery starts with a confession: “I know a little (a child can only be born from the unity of a man and a woman), but further on...?”

Never feel it unconventional or impolite to ask from God! He loves our questions, even the stupid ones! On questions He is always ready to respond. Those who never ask from Him, will never get His answers either! See, what a response to Mary is given! (v 35-37) A pretty rational one! Describing the whole process, step by step. She who wants to UNDERSTAND, a logical explanation is given. Thomas, who was unable to believe, was given an experimental response: „Come closer and touch!” - Isn't that amazing that the Almighty God, owner of heaven and earth adjusts His responses to the character of each one of us?

But this “*How can this be...?*” is covering something even more! - A few years ago a young violinist-genius performed in one concert all the 6 solo partitas of J.S.Bach on violin. A unique and absolutely brave decision in 150 minutes standing with 4 strings on the stage and 1 500 people in the seats. In the break queuing up for coffee, I heard whispering the same question that I had had in my mind, too: „How can this be on 4 strings?” Of course, 5 fingers and a right hand with a, a teenager-genius, yes – I know, but all the rest above: HOW CAN THIS BE? This is the ‘amazement’, much more than an otherwise brave question! Amazement is a “the brain stops here!” - confession!

And ... amazement culminates at the point where Mary “drops the response”. She is no longer asking; no longer moving on the logical line, but stopping with it. I like her putting her “weapons” down. “No, thank you, no more is needed: it was just pure amazement, confrontation with the Transcendent, my brain completely stops here!”

This is what I like in Mary. The honesty and braveness of her approach to the Almighty. And still more... but let us see it tomorrow!

Marta Risko – country leader TLM Hungary



Mary – 2.

Luke 1,26-38 King James Version

Let us go on with Mary!

I remember from many years ago, an excellent man from the church. He came from a centuries-long leading intellectual family. His family had given writers, bishops, researchers, a poet, a mathematician and many other “brain-tanks” to our nation. He, too, in keeping with his genetics, had huge reserves in his head as a psychologist and lecturer at a university. In the church: struggling with inconsequent verses in the Bible, scandalous stories from the Old Testament, disputing “mistakes” of a certain Bible text and its translation: each after-Sunday-service time was a challenge with him on board! And the same with his two super-clever kids! Always disputing, seeking “truth..” and discussing with the minister as with an opponent of the PhD...

The father was once given a scholarship to an American university. Along with his wife and children he moved oversea for one year; and came back as a lamb. A gentle, soft, obedient lamb in the Shepherd’s flock. The wife and two kids like his spring lambs... What had happened? He simply converted from a logics-centred man to an obedience-centred one! Later, when I asked him about some psychological observations through my sermons about my character’s defaults, his answer was: “Can you believe that I do not notice at all whether you are a boy or a girl on the preaching stool, just the message you proclaim?” This was his wonderful conversion of a logics-centred man to become an obedience-centred one.

Mary’s braveness culminates in her confession: “*Be it unto me...*” All her knowledge and wisdom about medicine, the unity of man and woman and nature of childbirth: gone. All the logical explanation and understanding about angelic explanation: gone. “*Be it unto me...*” Mary now enters into the Holy of the Holies, into that aura where the brain stops and reason works no more. This is a special place: the holy aura of OBEDIENCE: “*For with God nothing shall be impossible.*”

Mary, whose value and pride had formerly been her pureness, her cleverness, her braveness: each one a fantastic human merit in itself! – now demonstrates: the highest level of all immanent human pride and understanding which is the unconditional obedience to the Transcendent. The utmost “highest” ones, standing on the summit of any immanent height have just one level higher to break through: towards the Transcendent.

Mary met Him. Verily and really. Through obedience. Putting down her weapons, reasons, obstacles, oppositions and arguments... “*Be it unto me...*”

Yes, this transformation is what with men is fully impossible! But with God: possible!

Marta Risko – country leader TLM Hungary



Advent – Let's Meet Joseph 1.

Matthew 1:18-19

Last year I remember writing a piece for the Bridge about Mary. This year I thought I would write a little about Joseph. What does the Bible, really the Gospels tell us about him?

Matthew's Gospel begins with an extended genealogy connecting Joseph's family line back to King David and then all the way back to Abraham – the father of the Jewish nation. Why? Well Joseph represented the fulfilment of two specific and powerful promises God made to His people:

a.) **Genesis 12:1-3** God's promise to Abraham that *'all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you'*.
And

b.) **Samuel 7:16** God's promise to David that *'your house and kingdom will endure before Me forever'*.
Now we need to be clear that Jesus was the ultimate fulfilment of these two promises.

However the Gospel writers made sure to secure Joseph's legal status as Jesus' guardian through these promises.

We have a few insights into the life of Joseph. Look for them in the Gospels, and see a man of faith, of great strength of character, a man trusted with the earthly care of God's only Son – so a very special man specifically chosen by God.

But let's meet Joseph:

I am Joseph.

I am a small business man in a small town.

I make furniture, simple, solid, robust furniture – chairs, tables, bed frames, stools.

I make them with great care.

Mostly I sell to local farmers.

I make farm implements – ploughs, threshing sledges, yokes.

I work hard and there's not much spare time – especially now.

I'm busy you see, making furniture for my own home.

I've not bothered much before – but

Now there's Mary to think about – she's going to be my wife.

I need to get things ready for her – I love her you see.

Matthew 1:18-19 tells us that Joseph was a righteous (upright, honourable) man. He was not vindictive or spiteful. He cared for his betrothed at a time when genuine feelings were not a prerequisite for marriage. Imagine then, his feelings and thoughts when Mary tells him that she is going to have a baby and wait for it, the angel Gabriel told her that the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Can he believe that?

What can I do now?

God why has this happened to me?

God, how could you take away my happiness?

This is a nightmare.

Oh, what am I to do?

Would you believe it if you had been in his position?

Christine Osman, retired International Treasurer, Scotland



Advent – Let's Meet Joseph 2.

Did he spend time waiting on God. We see, from the Gospels, that Joseph was a religious man. Was he in the habit of spending time quietly with God, thinking, praying? Imagine, this time. He would not be quiet, his mind would be in turmoil, what was going on? Eventually, he decided not to cause Mary disgrace over her pregnancy but to divorce her secretly and he's emotionally exhausted; he's slumped over some of the furniture he's been making. Then....

It was the strangest of dreams, ludicrous really, yet I just can't get it out of my mind.

You see, I dreamt God was speaking to me.

No not face to face, I don't mean that, but through an angel, claiming to be His special messenger.

And do you know what he told me?

Don't be afraid

Take Mary to be your wife, that's what.

Just when I'd decided to put her quietly aside, hush up the scandal as best as I could,

This character telling me to think again,

And why?

Because apparently it was nothing to do with her,

the baby she's carrying not the result of some fleeting passion,

but conceived of the Holy Spirit, ordained by God Himself.

Well I've heard a few excuses in my time but that one really takes the biscuit!

I mean, who did the fellow think I was – some fool born yesterday?

It was laughable, and I'd usually have dismissed it without a second thought.

Yet I didn't -

not then,

not now.

I had this feeling deep within

that somehow God had touched me;

that, like it or not, life was changed forever.

Joseph was chosen by God for this role. He was a righteous man; he was evidently devout and well-grounded in the faith. He was a decisive man but only after careful thought. He was obedient to God's leading. He was reliable. There is something compelling about this man. He accomplished the task given to him by God, so what more do we need to know about him.

But stay with Joseph as he toils those difficult miles with Mary to Bethlehem months later. Is he still remembering that dream, that feeling deep within him after it? Is he thinking something like:

I will never forget these last months.

Will this child be different from other children?

I will just treat him as I would if he were really MY son.

I wonder what God has in store for us as a family.

As quietly as Joseph is throughout the Christmas story, so he quietly fades out of Jesus story.

This Christmas think about Joseph and his quiet acceptance of the tumultuous events that start Jesus life on earth. Are you, am I, as quietly accepting of our role in the Christian story in the 21st century?



Immaculate Parenthood

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about^[d]: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^[e] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^[f] because he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"^[g] (which means "God with us"). Matthew 1,18-23

"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." Luke 1,30-33

Centrepiece of Nazareth is the Middle East's largest basilica, the Franciscan Church of the Annunciation, where Mary is alleged to have received word that she'd been chosen to bear the son of God. So there it is, well lit up at night with a beautiful view of it from the balcony of St Margaret's Hostel. My son André and I had wandered down through the steep streets above it last evening and met pilgrims from somewhere having late night mass. But today our group visits with Sayeed, our guide telling us all about it. Constructed only in 1969, so not there on our last visit.

We process religiously down to the lower level and pass the altar where Mary received the message; then to the large church upstairs. It really is huge. In the courtyard and around the church, dozens of mosaics donated by different countries portray the event in colourful expressions of their own culture. But no England, and no South Africa contributions (yet).

It seems all about Mary, with plenty of '*Hail Marys, full of grace and truth, blessed art thou among women.*' Fair enough, she deserves to be honoured, as do all mothers.

And I can remember my own good mother, and I especially remember the mother of our children - how I wish she could be with us here. And other mothers.

But why not also honouring parenthood? Even if he was conceived immaculately, he was reared in a home where the values of both parents count. Perhaps that's why the church next door is called the Church of St Joseph...

I feel for those denied the privilege of parenthood, but feel honoured to be one myself.

Paul du Plessis Dr

After a lifetime of service with The Salvation Army, including India, South African born Dr Paul du Plessis 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 TLM for Zambia in the 1970s. He is a former vice-president of TLM.



Joseph

My uncle used to read the Bible because he enjoyed the stories, but it was not a devotional activity. That is one way to read about Joseph and his brothers. There are plenty of unedifying things that include fraternal jealousy, enabling a brother's widow to have children, or the self-appointed « hero » who proclaims that, in his family, he is the best of the bunch. The story is also about dreams which were one of the vehicles of divine revelation. Jacob, the father, loved Joseph more than the other brothers - a source of trouble, especially when Joseph dreamt that his brothers' sheaves bowed down to his sheaves and that the sun and the moon bowed down to Joseph himself. Even his adoring father thought that this was too much!

They disparaged the « dreamer » and it was only Reuben who could persuade the others in the family not to kill Joseph. He was thrown into a pit, sold to a passing group, when Reuben was not present, and they all connived by staining Joseph's coat with blood to pretend that he had been killed by an animal.

That is not all because, there is a sub plot (cpt. 38). Judah, one of the brothers, married an Adullamite called Hirah. Their dissolute eldest son married Tamar but died young without issue. He left Judah to arrange for Onan, a younger brother, in the hope that he would make her pregnant. That was a welfare system for looking after widows because childless women faced a difficult old age. In fact the child, was fathered by Judah!

Joseph, attractive person and capable of « surviving, had ended up in Egypt where Potiphar's, the captain of Pharaoh's guard, put him in charge of his household. Potiphar's wife was attracted by Joseph, who refused her advances. « Mrs Potiphar » grabbed his garment recalling another garment earlier in the story. Joseph, the imprisoned childhood dreamer became an adult interpreter of dreams. The arrogant son was charming. He could talk to anyone, even in a prison where the other prisoners are committed to his care. Joseph correctly interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker. The reinstated butler promised to remember him and then « forgot » until Pharaoh dreamt of thin cows and fat cows. Because it was thought that dreams were a means of revelation, Joseph, supposedly adulterous imprisoned, was summoned to interpret. He foretold seven years of famine. Finally, with his evident ability, he managed a huge national plan to enable the nation to survive famine and disaster. There was corn for Egypt and enough to sell.

In the last stage of the story ten brothers, without Benjamin, came to buy corn. Joseph, now a great man in his thirties, faced the dilemma of love for his family, despite everything, and prudence faced with his brothers. He sold the corn. There would be no more unless Benjamin came next time. Benjamin did come, the corn was bought and the servants to put the money (back a second time) in his brothers' sacks. Joseph's silver cup was in Benjamin's sack. We listen in suspense as the search for the cup ends with the youngest brother. Dismayed and distressed Reuben, who had saved Joseph's life many years before, came to say : « A word in you ear my Lord » and goes on to offer himself in slavery to Joseph so that Benjamin could go home. At that moment Joseph knew that there had been a change of heart.

There is a theological point. St Paul refers nearly always to reconciliation when he means what we might want to call forgiveness. The story contains neither punishment nor triumph because reconciliation is rediscovery.

Finally, the magnificent story in the Jewish Bible is made complete in the New Testament and that is the history of our salvation. Read it also as a story, better understood in several respects by adults than by children!

James Barnett

is an Anglican priest. He was involved in syllabus development and theological education in secondary schools and in preparing men and women for Christian ministry. He was Archbishop of Canterbury's Representative at the European Institutions and currently represents the Intereuropean Commission on Church and School at the Council of Europe. With his wife Elisabeth, he is secretary of the Mission Lèpre France.



Magnificat Mary's Song

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

(Luke 1,46-55)



Mary's Song 1.

Luke 1: 46-66 (NIV) p/t 1

Mary - Christmas card or nativity play image - Mary gentle, meek and mild. Which may all be true but Mary's song also known as the Magnificat shows she has depth; intellect; a deep spirituality- she really knows God and that gives her confidence. She lived her life from the top down. What do I mean by that?

There are two ways we can live our life. One is to start with our life and our experience and project that on to God. What could be described as the bottom-up approach. The result is, when things are good, some feel like God's a good God and he's close and he loves me and he cares about me. And when things are hard, some start to wonder, "Is there really a God?" They start to gravitate toward agnosticism or atheism. Or maybe God is very, very far away, and he's not really interested in my life. Or maybe God's an impersonal force, not a person; maybe I'm on my own; I don't really have a relationship with God. Maybe God is good and evil, yin and yang. Or an aberration of Christian theology called "process theology" or "open theism." Maybe God is good, but he's powerless. He's impotent. He wants to help me, he wants to do good, but he's just not powerful and strong enough.

The result is, if you start bottom-up-you start with your feelings and experiences and sin and sadness and suffering, and you project them toward God- when you need him most you'll run from him not to him. You'll have questions about him. And you're going to be in a difficult place. Some of you are there today. You're certain that your future is uncertain. What's going to happen next? How is this going to work out? Life has become very complicated.

The other way to live life is what can be called the top-down approach. It is to assume that God is who He says He is; that the Bible is true and that it reveals to us the character, the nature, the attributes of God. Believing that and then interpreting all of our life in light of what God says and who God says He is. If that's the case then, as we study Scripture, we realise God is good. He made the world good; we've corrupted it through sin. The sin, the suffering and the sadness that is experienced, is not because of God, it's because of Satan, demons and sinners all working together in a war against God. God is good, altogether always and only good. And God has a plan that he is working out and unfolding through history to be redeemer; liberator; deliverer and Saviour.

So when we are suffering, anxious, or frustrated, we are to trust in God, run *to* God, not to run *from* God. God often in Scripture provides people to serve as examples. Some are very negative, responding in ways that are deplorable. Their life and their legacy suffer. God gives them to us as warnings. Other people respond to God in faith. They trust Him. They trust His word. They trust His character. They trust His promises, particularly in the most difficult of circumstances, and they are for us wonderful examples.

One of the best examples is a young woman named Mary. She is an amazing woman. Her story starts in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, chapter 7, verse 14, hundreds of years before she was even born. Isaiah the prophet revealed through the Holy Spirit that a virgin, would give birth to a son. And that his name would be Immanuel, which means God with us.

More about Mary tomorrow.



Mary's Song 2.

Luke 1: 46-66 (NIV) p/t 2 When the time was right the angel Gabriel shows up to a young woman named Mary. She's probably a teenager. You could be betrothed as early as 12. About a year later, married as young as 13. She's in a small town called Nazareth, at that time a very small town. She is potentially illiterate. She is from a poor working-class family. She's engaged to a man named Joseph. She is preparing for her wedding, and the angel Gabriel shows up. The whole script of her life changes when he says, "You've been chosen by God, favoured by God, you're going to be the promised mother of Immanuel, God with us." She has faith but questions, and so she asks, "How can this be? I'm a virgin." The angel Gabriel says, "It'll be a miracle. God the Holy Spirit, he will enable you to conceive. You'll give birth to Jesus."

Mary is also told by Gabriel that her relative Elizabeth, who has never had children, and is beyond childbearing years, has also been blessed of God, and she will give birth to John the Baptist. On hearing of this, Mary is so excited she packs up her things and makes the roughly 100-mile hike through the wilderness into the Judean hillside to go to the home of Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah. She spends a few months with them, and we pick up the story in Luke, chapter 1, verse 46.

Mary was away from home. She didn't exactly know what would await her when she returned. Would Joseph really want to marry her? After all, she said she was a virgin, but would he believe that? Would he divorce her, leave and abandon her? What about her reputation? She was called a harlot, and a tramp. She told everyone, "I love God, it's a miracle, God made me pregnant." And they all laughed and made fun of her.

Not to mention the concern for pregnancy. In a small town, without great medical care, plus you're poor. It's dangerous. A lot of women died in childbirth. A lot of children died in infancy. In that day, if she was considered a harlot, then they could take her out to the market square, strip her, put rags on her, beat her, mock her, call her a whore, spit on her, and leave her there as an example for all the other women in town. What about her family? Would they reject her? Or believe that God was using her? Not to mention the pressure of being the mother of God. That on its own, for a young girl, is a lot of pressure. She's a first-time mum. What a way to start. Here's God, do a good job.

What we read is her language of worship. Now worship is all of life, but it includes singing. She begins by saying, "My soul magnifies the Lord." We're image-bearers of God, we are to reflect, mirror, the love, the truth, the compassion, the justice, the selflessness, the humility of God.

What she's saying is, "In my soul, even though my life is uncertain-my health, my reputation, my marriage, my family, my future, I'm poor, I'm pregnant -I just want God to be honoured. I want God to be glorified. I want others to see, even in my life, that God is good. And he's good to me"

Mary says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit"- she is worshiping God with her spirit. It is her spirit and the Holy Spirit intersecting to honour Jesus, the son to be born in her womb, that God the Father might get praise.

More about Mary and the Magnificat tomorrow.

Linda Todd, Country Leader of TLM Scotland since 1998.



Mary's Song 3.

Luke 1: 46-66 (NIV) p/t 3

Mary lists in her song, the Magnificat, at least 17 attributes of God. She is possibly, likely illiterate. In that day, it would have been very unusual for a woman of her age and socioeconomic status to be formally educated in that rural town. She may be literate; it is more likely that she heard the Scriptures read to her in synagogue on Sabbath, she committed them to memory and she is choosing to live her life top-down: "Who is God? I'm going to live in light of that."

Mary lists 17 attributes of God showing amazing theological understanding. She knows who God is and she trusts the Scriptures. And when she could be worrying, she starts worshipping.

Sadly I don't have time or space to write about all 17 attributes. I'll do the first three. However just so you believe there are 17 the remaining 14 are:

- | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 4. God is respectful | 5. God is mighty | 6. God is personal | 7. God is holy | 8. God is merciful |
| 9. God is worthy | 10. God is powerful | 11. God is sovereign | 12. God is gracious | 13. God is generous |
| 14. God is just | 15. God is humble | 16. God is faithful | 17. God is eternal | 1. God is the Lord. |

"My soul magnifies the Lord." What that means is that her God, he's in charge. He is above all, all other kings, all other kingdoms. Satan, demons, religions. Her God, our God, Yahweh, he's above everyone and everything. There's no one beyond him. This is of great comfort for her. As she looks at her life and her future—"What will happen with my husband and my reputation, and my family, and how will I feed this child, and how will I raise God?"—what she says is, "You know what, the Lord's in charge. The Lord's in charge. I trust him." So this is where theology becomes biography that it might culminate in doxology.

How we see God changes who we are, and it changes how we live. It's easy to say, "Jesus Christ is Lord" when things are going great. When things are difficult, or your future is uncertain, suddenly, you're saying, I don't know, worry is lord, finances are lord, reputation is lord, wellbeing is lord, comfort is lord."

Mary says, "No, my God is Lord. Whatever he has, that's what I receive."

More about Mary and the Magnificat tomorrow.

Linda Todd, Country Leader of TLM Scotland since 1998.



Mary's Song 4.

Luke 1: 46-66 (NIV) p/t 4

2. GOD IS Saviour

Number two, she says that her God is Saviour. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." Some would tell you that Mary was sinless; she wasn't. She in fact notes that she herself needs a Saviour. We're all sinners. Like Mary, we all need a Saviour. And Saviour means rescuer, deliverer, hero. Scripture is God's story of human history, and his involvement in it on a rescue mission as the hero. He's the Saviour. And ultimately, her Saviour will be her son. That Jesus will be born. That he will live without sin. That he will die for her sin. That he will rise for her salvation. That her son will be her Saviour.

3. GOD IS OMNISCIANT

Number three. She says that God is what we'll call omniscient, which means all knowing. She says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant." What she says is, "My God knows everything. My God knows that I'm young. My God knows that I'm poor. My God knows that I'm pregnant. My God knows that I don't have a lot of resources at my disposal. My God knows that my reputation is going to be destroyed. My God knows that my life is going to be difficult and complicated. My God knows." This is where our view of God is so incredibly important. Some say, "Oh all religions teach basically the same thing." No they don't. For example pantheism, a big word for vague spirituality-God's not a person, he's a force; he doesn't pay attention to you, it's just an energy that endows you. Our God is personal. He's alive. He's living. He's personal. He thinks, he feels, he speaks, he loves, he knows. God knows every hair on your head, the Bible says. God knows every longing of your heart. He knows every day of your life. God knows it all. And do you know what, he pays attention. There are a lot of people, but God knows everyone by name. And he pays attention to the exact circumstances of their life. And he's a Father who is attentive in detail to all of his sons and daughter.

No one's paying attention to Mary. She's in Nazareth, not Jerusalem. She's single, not married. She's young, not old. She's poor, not rich. What she says is, "Nonetheless, God knows me, and God loves me, and God pays attention to my life, and God knows my needs."

Do you believe that? If you do, you'll sleep differently. Isn't it amazing that she starts her song saying, "God is my Lord and he's my Saviour? She doesn't start with all of her complaints toward God. "God, you know, the dress isn't going to fit. The boyfriend's kind of freaking out. My parents are wondering how to explain this to my grandmother. It's going to be really awkward at synagogue with a baby and no husband quite yet. Oh and by the way, I'm too young, and this seems like a lot for me." What she says is, "He's the Lord, whatever he wants, he's my Saviour. He'll get me through."

Whatever we face in the Global Fellowship in 2017 God will get us through. Do you believe this?

Linda Todd, Country Leader of TLM Scotland since 1998.



Messiah

I have been enjoying listening to Handel's oratorio Messiah recently. What an inspired piece of music it is. It is really the story of our salvation, starting with the darkness and difficulties that we are in, then the coming of Jesus as a baby, then His life, death and resurrection and finally His coming again. One of the passages that struck me as I prepared for Christmas was from Malachi.

And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. (Malachi 3:3)

It brought me up with a jolt. Yes I got that the world was dark and godless and that we needed comfort and help. I also understood that the Lord was going to shake the nations but then He addresses us, the church. In these dark times we need to be purified, to be squeaky clean. It's not about what's going on out there but rather what's going on in us. The darker the time, the cleaner and closer to God we need to be. If we are not praying, seeking the Lord, and shining the light then there is no hope. It put me in mind of the verse in **2 Chronicles 7:14**.

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

So when the days seem dark and uncertain instead of worrying about "them" or "the situation" I am going to turn to the Lord. I'm going to ask Him to purify and cleanse me. Then to teach me the prayers that he wants me to pray so that His will is done on earth and there will be righteousness and healing that starts with me.

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.



The joy of Christmas

Mary forgot the pain and anguish
For joy that a Child was born,
The only begotten Son of God - her first born Son,
Laid in a manger.
No comfy cot was His - but rough simplicity
For the birth of the Christ Child.

The shepherds forgot the cold dark night
For joy at the angels good news.
Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth
Good will towards men,
They sang with one accord, for a Saviour,
The Christ Child was born.

The wise men forgot their weariness,
And rejoiced with exceeding great joy,
When they saw the star over Bethlehem,
The place where the Infant lay.
They offered their gifts and worshipped Him
The Christ Child Who was born.

But what of Him, the helpless Babe, what earthly joy was His?
Who left the glories of His heavenly home
And became poor that we might be rich.
He despised the shame of the cross,
For the joy that was set before Him,
This blessed Christ Child.

He came as Man, with man to dwell,
And with joy His birth was proclaimed.
Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift,
A message old but ever new -
He came to seek and save the lost, the Saviour,
Joy giver, this beloved Christ Child.

The heartache of an anguished world, strife and suffering,
Anger, pain, separation from those we love,
Are eased and comforted for a time,
As we celebrate again the Lords birth,
And glimpse the wondrous love of God.
In joy, behold the Christ Child.



Life's Ingredients

Every Christmas I get a box of my favourite sweets whose ingredients are Sugar, Treacle, Flour, Glucose, Gelatine, Cornflour, Tri-Calcium Phosphate, Sodium Alginate, Tri-Sodium Citrate. They don't sound very nice, do they, but when all these ingredients are mixed together I get my box of Liquorice Allsorts!

It doesn't do to be put off by a list of ingredients. Even things which do not sound very pleasant are needed to make up something good. Life is like that too. It is made up of all sorts of situations – 'ingredients' – some easy, some hard, some enjoyable, some painful, etc.

Over the years I have experienced some of life's 'ingredients' and at Christmas-time I think afresh of One who changed my life and took the 'all sorts' of my character and refashioned them into something better.

In the Christmas story there were several 'assorted' people who came to visit the infant Jesus – the inn keeper, the shepherds, the Magi, Simeon and Anna, whose lives were changed for ever after their encounter with Him.

*“Thou who art God beyond all praising,
all for love's sake becamest man;
stooping so low, but sinners raising
heavenwards by Thine eternal plan.
Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest man.*

*Thou who art love beyond all telling,
Saviour and King, we worship Thee,
Immanuel, within us dwelling,
Make us what Thou wouldst have us be.
Thou who art love beyond all telling,
Saviour and King, we worship Thee.” (Frank Houghton)*

Why not this Christmas let Jesus take the 'ingredients' of your life and fashion them into something better?

Pat Adlam

is a long term supporter of TLM, who has visited the field work on different occasions in Maharashtra, Nepal, West Bengal and Bangladesh, as well as spending 3months as a volunteer at DBLM hospital in Nilphamari



Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

- Boxing Day -



At Christmas we give and receive gifts. When I was younger, I wanted to receive and wasn't that bothered about the giving bit (!) As an adult, I delight in giving gifts at Christmas, I am not so much bothered about the receiving. I seem to have everything I need at almost 50 years old.

As I was wrapping my presents to give to my family and friends, I thought about what gifts I would like to give to the Global fellowship using the acronym G.I.F.T.

2 Corinthians 9:15

G: The first gift I want to give to you all is **Gratitude**

Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Philippians 1:3

It is so easy to take people for granted, to expect them to play their role without thanking them. This year I am going to be more grateful for each and every one of you. You each contribute to so much to make the Global Fellowship great.

I: My second gift to you all is to be **Intentional**

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another Hebrews 10:24-25

I am going to be intentional to reaching out to you despite the miles and time zones that separate us. It may take extra effort, it may be inconvenient at times. 9am – 5pm UK time does not suit my brothers and sisters in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste, so I have to be flexible and intentional in agreeing suitable times to meet on Skype etc. I am also going to be intentional to meeting with my colleagues at TLMI for non-work stuff – just to enjoy one another's company!

F: Thirdly, **Forgiveness**

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Colossians 3:13

Let's be honest, we are all going to mess up at one time or another! If the Global Fellowship can be a place of love and forgiveness, then we will be able to overcome so much more. I will need you to forgive me and I promise to forgive you *seventy times seven*.

T: Last, but not least = **Team**

All the believers were one in heart and mind Acts 4:32

The ribbon that ties the gift together is our unity. We need to be on in heart and mind, united toward achieving our vision of **Leprosy defeated. Lives transformed.** Does this mean we will all think the same way? No! But we must allow diversity; but for the things that matter – our values, our desire to see Christ glorified, we will be one.

Bless you all this Christmas

Jannine Ebenso.

With TLM since 1991. Served in Nigeria for 16 years. At TLMI since 2008. Head of Quality Assurance at TLMI since May 2014.



Mission statement for a Kingdom

Matthew 20: 1-34

I mentioned in my last devotional that the home group I lead was going to study “The Kingdom of Heaven.” Today we reached study 4, the purpose of the study “*To explore the kingdom values taught and demonstrated by Jesus*”.

When I worked at the International Office, I remember wondering why we need mission statements, which seemed to me all about words and disconnected with deeds. Why didn't we just get on with the job? But I realised that when we work somewhat aimlessly we actually didn't achieve very much it does help us to keep focused on the goal. At the last hospital base where I worked we decided to focus our prayers on the staff at the hospital, (that was manageable) we could communicate with them. We were surprised when we saw answers to our prayers in specific ways, like praying for families rather than just individuals to understand the saving power of Jesus. The impact of this was that they also communicated to others who were beyond our limited language capabilities.

So what values do we see in the story of the land owner who paid wages in an unusual fashion. First he needed to harvest the crop of grapes. He went to seek workers and found some and made a deal with them which they found acceptable. Three hours later he needed more workers so went out to look for them, this time though he just said he would pay them what was right. Six, nine, and eleven hours later he went out again and again. Did this mean that the harvest was so plentiful that every hour counted? Or was he just concerned that people out there would be going hungry that night. He promised that he would pay these labourers what was right. Then at the end of the day, starting with the last to be hired, they were all paid the same; a wage which meant everyone had sufficient to buy enough food for the home. Naturally there was some grumbling. Expectations had been raised that the landowner was generous. So what would the reward be for those hired first, does greed creep in here?

Then we have story of the ambitious mother seeking power for her sons. Jesus tried to explain that the Kingdom of Heaven worked with different values. The first being made last and the last first, the “Lord” as one who serves. The questions in the book we used asked how we could make our communities different if we used these Kingdom values. I guess the trade unions would have a lot to say! How do we manage the situation around us with compassion and generosity?

I have always had a strong sense of justice. I understand the questioning of the hard working labourers, and can empathise with them. However the land owner was right in what he did and fulfilled his part of the bargain, as well as being generous. I am overwhelmed when I think of the gracious, goodness of the God whose kingdom we are part of. How kind to care enough to ensure everyone had enough food for the day, when he looked with eyes of compassion instead of hardening his heart to just giving the proscribed rate.

*Father, you turn our world values upside down by the demonstration of your love,
help us to follow your example.*

Joyce Missing.

Living in retirement in the south of England. Formerly a staff member. I worked in Bhutan from 1973 – 1991 [nurse/administrator]; then at the International Office 1991-2006



Something for nothing

“Freely you have received, freely give.” Matthew 10:8

Time to renew my motor insurance. Same time every year. Do I look for a new insurer, or stick with the old? Everyone seems to want my business. Adverts everywhere saying, “We’re cheaper than the others. Save money with us.”

I had this idea. If I went to an insurer who said he was cheaper and got a quote, I could mention that to the next insurer and get one cheaper still. Then on to the next and, if I worked at it, I’d get insurance cover for nothing. And, in my deepest fantasy, someone might even pay me for joining them.

The trouble is it doesn’t happen like that. Something for nothing never works out that way. Not just in motor insurance but in relationships too. Relationships cost. They cost in commitment; we can change our motor insurance every year but if we try that in our relationships we’re soon in trouble. They cost in effort too. In caring for the other person. It doesn’t come cheap but in our relationships the more we give the more we get in return, although that’s not why we do it. It’s all about that four-letter-word: love.

*Generous Lord, nothing comes for nothing, except your love.
Thank you.*

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)



The pearl beyond price

Many years ago I obtained a tiny book which I have treasured ever since, it is called “escaped as a bird” and was a collection of verses from the Christian poetry club at Oshima leprosy hospital (a government institution in Japan), published by TLM. The verses reveal that many of the poets had indeed found the “pearl of great price” of which Jesus spoke in *Matthew ch13,v45-46*. I want to share with you a few of these translated verses, which were written in a traditional economical Japanese style.

Bearing reproach and shame,
suffering, pain and loss,
My soul undaunted still shall march,
Holding aloft the Cross!

I would not change one little jot,
Of His dear will for me;
But in my weakness I would go,
Entrusting all my load of woe To Him who walks with me.

My Lord in me has found a dwelling place;
And I in Him. Oh, glorious boon to gain
To be His temple! Gladly will I face
In His great strength all bitterness and pain!

I saw the miracle the snow had wrought,
The white world shining here below,
And in my heart I prayed again to god,
Lord , make me whiter , even, than the snow!”

Since parting from my father
I have watched Ten slow years roll by;
Lost is the father of my flesh,
But found The Father of my soul!

What joy it is at early morn to meet
Besides the sea, with those who love our Lord
And whom we love; and there to read the Word,
And lay our burdens at our Master’s Feet.

C Ruth Butlin Dr - 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 TLMEW. 2013- now, skilled volunteer, sponsored by TLMEW, mainly working for DBLM hospital and rural health programmes in Bangladesh (also some work for TLMNepal)



Be Ready

Matthew 24:36-44

“What are you doing for Christmas?” “Are you ready for Christmas?” “What are your plans for the New Year?” How many times were you asked these questions in recent weeks?

“What are your plans?” is not a bad question. We need to plan and prepare but too much focus on the future (or the past) can easily rob us of the present. We can become so busy planning for the future that we miss what God is doing here and now especially when things happen in ways we do not expect. This is what happened when Jesus came to earth; the people were looking for a military victor to be their Messiah and they did not recognise Jesus for who he was. The Messiah they hoped for still hasn't come.

Jesus said that no one knows the day and hour when he will come again except God the Father. He also indicated that his return will not be how and when people expect him to come. In light of this, how should we live? “Be ready,” said Jesus. “Don't get side-tracked by trying to predict the when or how. Concentrate on being ready whenever for however.

Being ready is about how we live. Romans 13 speaks of living in God's light and putting aside the deeds of darkness. One translation puts it like this: *“the night is almost over; the day is almost here, so take off your night clothes and put on day clothes. Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus”* that is with the character of Christ.

Hebrews 12 tells us to put aside every impediment – the sin which easily hampers our forward movement

Colossians 3:12-15 instructs us to *“clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts and be thankful.”*

In our own strength we struggle to live like this but we have God's Word to guide us and the Holy Spirit to help us. *“God's divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”* (2 Peter 1:3-4)

This advent season let's make time to consider afresh our spiritual readiness to meet Jesus.

- ☐ Is there someone we need to forgive?
- ☐ Is there someone we need to be reconciled with?
- ☐ Is there something we should have done that needs doing?
- ☐ Do we need to be more disciplined in spending time in prayer and bible reading?
- ☐ Is there something we are holding onto that God wants us to give over to him?

One last scripture:

Romans 15:13 – May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.



**May these 5 “Return of Christ”-verses buoy you today,
and safeguard you in the year ahead!**

1) *1 Corinthians 16:22-“If anyone doesn’t love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O LORD, come!”*

Notice here, we have to do with THE CURSE OF SIN: Spiritual adultery and spiritual idolatry will bring with it death every time (Read Romans 3:23; 6:23).

2) *Rev 3:11- “Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”*

Here Scripture underscores again for us, the importance of holding on to our ASSURANCE OF SALVATION! *John 1:12* tells us how we can receive it!

John 16:33 tells us how Christ will help us to safeguard it!

And *John 17:3* tells us how we can continue to experience it!

3) *Rev 22:7- “Behold, I come quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this Book!”*

Regular Bible usage will bring about in our lives THE GLORY OF SANCTIFICATION.

John 17:17 says, “Sanctify them by your Truth. Your Word is Truth.” (Read Psalm 119:1-11, 105 and 130).

4) *Rev 22:12- “Behold, I am coming quickly and My reward is with Me, To give to everyone according to his work.”*

Colossians 3:17 advises us to do everything we say and do, to God’s honour!

The sobering reason for this is, that our activities here on earth will bring with it in Heaven THE REWARDS OF SERVICE. (*Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-17*). Works of service don’t save us, but they do show on whose side we’re on!

5) *Revelation 22:20- “Surely I am coming quickly. Amen - even so, come, Lord Jesus!”*

Do you notice with me here, THE JOY OF SURRENDER?!

May you joyfully continue to live with faith, hope and love in the Saviour Jesus Christ.

(*Read Philippians 1:21; 2:14,15,16; 3:7,14; 4:4,5,6*). Amen.



Greetings to you all in the New Year in the wonderful Name of Jesus!

Psalm 119:9-11 teaches both young and old – “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your Word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”

In Acts 20:6-12 a young man, Eutychus (his name means ‘very lucky’), listened to God’s Word at length. Then it happened: Eutychus suddenly fell asleep during the sermon! Then Eutychus fell from the upstairs window, where he had been sitting! But thankfully, Eutychus also fell into the healing arms of Jesus that night: Via the apostle Paul, he was unceremoniously resurrected back to life again! “Very lucky”!

In this New Year, let us not be those who would test our fate, but rather those who would WALK IN WISDOM at all times! (Read Eph.5:15-21)

(V15) “...walk circumspectly” This year, BE CIRCUMSPECT AND WISE: Look before you leap! Think before you speak! Life is filled with making crucial decisions, and bad decisions make for bad consequences!

(V16) “...redeeming the time” This year, BE DILIGENT AND THRIFTY: Especially with your time, talents and treasures! Remember, time cannot be recycled – make the most of every minute of your life!

(V17) “...understand what the will of the LORD is” This year, BE PUNCTUAL AND UP-TO-DATE in doing the will of God for your life! May Romans 12:1,2 be your constant watchword in this regard!

(V18) “...be filled with the Spirit” This year, BE FILLED AND OVER-FLOWING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT! Don’t be filled with selfishness, debauchery or lust.... Live out 1John 1, smile and whistle while you work!

(V19) “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father...” This year, BE THANKFUL AND TRUSTING: (Read 1 Thes. 5: 16-18) Rest in God’s sovereign and providential care.

(V20) “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” This year, BE ACCOUNTABLE AND PURSUE INTEGRITY: Don’t sit with dark secrets in your soul, walk in love (Eph.5:1-7) and walk in the Light (Eph.5:8-14) with Jesus and your best friend!

In conclusion, reflect on Romans 14:7-9,
 “For none of us lives to himself,
 and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the LORD;
 and if we die, we die to the LORD. Therefore, whether we live or die,
 we are the LORD’s. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again,
 that He might be LORD of both the dead and the living.”

Amen.



“Whether It Is Tomorrow, or a Year from Now, or Twenty . . .” – 1.

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings.” Philippians 3:10

This past September, against immeasurable odds, my friend David celebrated his 50th birthday with friends and family. Many things could be said of David, but I am sure that he would want it said first and foremost that he is a follower of Jesus Christ.

Faith in Christ involves belief in a great rescue, not for the mighty, the proud, or the lofty power brokers of this world. Rather Christ is the Redeemer, the Saviour, of a race, a host of children, who begin by nature as poor, weak, humble, and acquainted with grief, enslaved to the fallen flesh that encompasses what they know of self. We are so unlike God by nature that it is always helpful to examine the life of one who demonstrates the nature of Christ so that we may draw closer to Him as we witness his or her example.

I first knew David as a little boy swimming around in the neighborhood pool of my grade school years. I had heard that he swam to help fight lung trouble from cystic fibrosis though I did not understand the grave implications of that disease. Years later, I learned in medical school that during the 60’s and 70’s, the life span for a child born with cystic fibrosis was only 2 or 3 years.

During my junior year of college, I had just become a follower of Jesus Christ, and I began working in a hospital to get a glimpse at the medical world and to help improve my resume for medical school.

During that very time, David was a frequent patient at the same hospital because of repeated bouts of pneumonia. Then, David was a small teenager, extremely thin, lying on his back under the oxygen tent, and *always* awake. I would go visit him whenever I had no work to do in the hospital. He would be lying flat on his back with his arms crossed behind his head and his legs crossed as if he were casually waiting for something to happen.

He never seemed worried about his condition. I heard many times from the doctors that his infection “this time” was very severe, but David never seemed to be anticipating anything besides battling on with better days ahead. I became aware through our visits that the better days were not necessarily ones on this earth. *His hope was in eternity.* His peace was in the knowledge that God held his life according to His will. David was so confident in that knowledge that it was a bit unnerving.

More about David tomorrow.

Doug Briggs, M.D. - American. Yunnan, China



“Whether it is tomorrow, a year from now, or twenty . . .” – 2.

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings.” Philippians 3:10

On one occasion David was admitted to the hospital shortly after giving a talk at a youth retreat. He was sick enough to need hospitalization the week before the retreat, but he put off his admission because of the desire to talk to a gathering of others his age. He told me about his message as he lay in the hospital during the days following the event. During his message, he said these words:

“When I was young, my parents were told that I would probably never live to be 3 years old, but with God’s help, I am now 14 going on 15. Many times I was not sure that I would get through, but each time God would reach down and pick me up . . . because He still had a purpose for me. Maybe it is to be here with you tonight. And I know that some day, whether it is tomorrow, or a year from now, or twenty, the Lord is going to take me home to be with Him, and I will finally be the presence of the One whom I have longed for so long.”

I was amazed by the words of this teenager, five years younger than I, who was a mature follower of Jesus. I was just beginning to learn the riches of having an eternal perspective. Truly the joy of heaven comes from being in the presence of Christ in glory, but at the time, thinking of David going to be with Jesus was a comfort to me as I pondered my own life and its extent, giving me a sense of being weaned from the anxieties and affections from this life *and a longing for that one.*

I am sure that David’s parents were constantly comforting themselves with the notion that the sadness in losing their only son would be tempered by the joy in knowing that because of the Father’s loss of His only son, David would be immediately taken into the presence of His glory.

As it turns out, many who sought to comfort their anxieties for David have now passed into eternity ahead of him. Rather than comforting them about David, God actually used David’s confidence and faith in the midst of his suffering to comfort them regarding the coming glory. The apostle Paul says confidence in that coming glory transforms even the worst suffering into a burst of anticipation.

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings.” Philippians 3:10

The verse David shared with us on his 50th birthday was Philippians 4:4,

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!”

One who does not know David might say, “Of course he can rejoice because he has lived much longer than expected!” But David’s life has been *a life of rejoicing* from the very beginning of the struggle. That little boy in the pool was rejoicing. That young teen in the oxygen tent was rejoicing. All through his medical struggles the many years since . . . rejoicing!

“Whether it is tomorrow, a year from now, or twenty . . .”



“... like the sun in the kingdom of their Father”

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matthew 13:43)

I once saw a number of young people come to faith in the cancer ward of a local hospital. They all had late stage bone cancer, but they had believed in Christ, and with excitement, their bibles, and newly learned hymns they went about sharing with other patients on the ward.

A few months later, a friend of mine had two orthopedic doctors from that hospital join his local prayer and bible study meeting. He asked them how they had come to have an interest in Christ, and one of them replied, “Those girls . . . *they are not normal!*”

Of course what the doctors were asking was, “Can this life be mine?” They had seen that life in the rejoicing of these girls they had once pitied *and now envied*.

The gospel proclamation is just so with God who most clearly shows Himself *not* in His might, His magnificent creation, or His raising and crushing of empires, but He most vividly demonstrates His nature with an open hand that stills the waves, comforts the cowering disciples, washes feet, and is nailed to a cross.

Even when the world cries: *“If you are God come down from there and save Yourself!”* He is still, He yields to the will of the Father, and He loses His life that we might have rescue. The strength of His love overcomes the demand to exercise His power and it shows us a strength that is even greater still.

In the demonstration of strength in weakness, wisdom in foolishness, and rejoicing in suffering, we see the hope that does not disappoint, life that has no end, and death swallowed up in victory.

*“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”
(Matthew 13:43)*

May each of us have that very peace that comes from being focused on eternity, leaning upon the promise of God in Christ Jesus even as we see those who, like David and these young people, have found Him faithful and true through suffering and the uncertainty of days... *and rejoiced!*



What is your story?

One of my Aunts is an amazing character: Christ-filled and fun-filled! She is a wonderful person to be around, in good times and bad. A glimpse into her character is evident in her answer phone message. I was trying to speak to her on the phone to break the dreadful news that my beloved Mother, to whom she was extremely close, had died. She was not there when I rang so I got the following greeting on her answerphone (spoken, not sung!): *"This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour, all the day long. Now tell me, what's your story?"* Many of you will know that the first line is taken from the great hymn 'Blessed Assurance'. But can you imagine my surprise upon hearing this message? For a moment I completely forgot my grief and the sad news I had been preparing to tell her, and a huge smile spread across my face as this message so vividly portrayed the way my Aunt lives her life.

My smile and delight was then replaced by a slight panic as I began to think about how, as a Christian, I would answer the question 'Now tell me, what's your story?' Well, I'm not going to attempt to answer that question now but, rather, convey what I learnt from that answerphone message.

- ❖ Even in your darkest times a glimpse of Jesus or a Christ-filled life can lift you out of deep sorrow and put a smile on your face
- ❖ Although hard, it's not as difficult as you think to follow St. Paul's teachings and praise God in all circumstances: *"...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* 1 Thess 5:18
- ❖ Singing some of your favourite, uplifting hymns is a brilliant way of lifting your spirits whatever your circumstances

So, what is my story? Well, I still can't answer that succinctly but know that it's still being written and, whatever it is, I believe God has a desire for me to be filled with his Spirit and to be Christ-like. So, what a blessing it is to work for The Leprosy Mission a Christian where we are encouraged to praise God as part of work. So why don't you join with me today and, and lift your voice and your spirits by singing your favourite song of praise? If you want to sing that wonderful hymn, 'Blessed Assurance', I've even included the words below!

1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

*Refrain: This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.*

2. Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels, descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
Refrain.....

3. Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest,
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.
Refrain....



The Next Town

Mark 1: 32-39

Jesus had been having a busy time, healing the sick and driving out demons well into the evening, with people travelling far to hear him, queuing out the door. Imagine if you were on an evangelistic mission trip having a similar level of success. You'd be amazed at the high turnout, grateful to God for the fruit that was coming from your labours. In fact, you'd plan another meeting the next day in this place that was so fertile for the Gospel. You'd schedule an unplanned extra evening event to cater for the demand.

This seemed to be the way the disciples were thinking, "everyone is looking for you Jesus". What does Jesus do though? He says in v38 "let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages". The New King James version translates this as the 'next town'. Jesus knew that he had to keep moving, keep spreading the good news, he was looking ahead to the next thing, the next place. Not for him the comfort of the known and the successful.

How many of us enjoy the known and the comfortable? Are we ready to learn from Jesus' example and tune into the prompting of God in our lives, leading us into our 'next town'? This may not necessarily be a new geographical place, but could also be a new challenge, a new service, a new role.

This passage also reminds us once again of the importance of prayer and communication with God. Without that we won't hear the call of the 'next town' that God is giving us. What 'next town' is God calling you to today? Let's pray together and listen to what he says.

O Lord,

Open my eyes to see where you would lead me.

Awaken my ears that I would hear your voice guiding me.

Inspire my mind that I may comprehend your love for me.

Soften my heart that I would offer grace to those I meet.

Watch my feet that I would tread upon your kingdom paths.

Guard my heart from selfishness that I would give freely.

Inspire my words that I may speak of hope and healing.

O Lord, I follow you. (Anon.)

Amen.



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. Let's continue our journey.

Daleth

Psalm 119:25-32

vs25 - I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word.

Have you ever felt that life has pushed your face into the dust of circumstances? You'll make it if you live your life according to the Word of God.

vs26 - I gave an account of my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees.

Oh to be honest, open and real with our Heavenly Father! He will always direct us in the ways of His Word to us.

vs27 - Cause me to understand the way of your precepts, that I may meditate on your wonderful deeds.

Our Heavenly Father longs for us to depend upon Him so that He cause us to concentrate on His wonderful ways.

vs28 - My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.

There is nothing in this world as powerful and uplifting than the Word! A shelter in the time of a storm.

vs29 - Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me and teach me your law.

We're told that "the heart is deceitful above all else", the Word, read and applied keeps us on the "narrow way".

vs30-31 - I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws. I hold fast to your statutes, Lord; do not let me be put to shame.

Stability, faithfulness and steadfastness come from the Word!

vs32 - I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.

Running is indicative of being determined, determined to understand the Word. Understanding brings confidence, stamina and new abilities.

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



Psalm 37

Of David

¹ Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;
² for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.

³ Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

⁴ Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

⁵ Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:

⁶ He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.

⁷ Be still before the LORD
and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.

⁸ Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.

⁹ For those who are evil will be destroyed,
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

¹⁰ A little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look for them, they will not be found.

¹¹ But the meek will inherit the land
and enjoy peace and prosperity.

¹² The wicked plot against the righteous
and gnash their teeth at them;

¹³ but the Lord laughs at the wicked,
for he knows their day is coming.

¹⁴ The wicked draw the sword
and bend the bow

to bring down the poor and needy,
to slay those whose ways are upright.

¹⁵ But their swords will pierce their own hearts,
and their bows will be broken.

¹⁶ Better the little that the righteous have
than the wealth of many wicked;
¹⁷ for the power of the wicked will be broken,
but the LORD upholds the righteous.

¹⁸ The blameless spend their days under the LORD's care,
and their inheritance will endure forever.

¹⁹ In times of disaster they will not wither;
in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.

²⁰ But the wicked will perish:
Though the LORD's enemies are like the flowers of the field,
they will be consumed, they will go up in smoke.

²¹ The wicked borrow and do not repay,
but the righteous give generously;
²² those the LORD blesses will inherit the land,
but those he curses will be destroyed.

²³ The LORD makes firm the steps
of the one who delights in him;
²⁴ though he may stumble, he will not fall,
for the LORD upholds him with his hand.

²⁵ I was young and now I am old,
yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.
²⁶ They are always generous and lend freely;
their children will be a blessing.^[b]

²⁷ Turn from evil and do good;
then you will dwell in the land forever.

²⁸ For the LORD loves the just
and will not forsake his faithful ones.

Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed^[c];
the offspring of the wicked will perish.

²⁹ The righteous will inherit the land
and dwell in it forever.

³⁰ The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom,
and their tongues speak what is just.

³¹ The law of their God is in their hearts;
their feet do not slip.

³² The wicked lie in wait for the righteous,
intent on putting them to death;
³³ but the LORD will not leave them in the power of the wicked
or let them be condemned when brought to trial.

³⁴ Hope in the LORD
and keep his way.

He will exalt you to inherit the land;
when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it.

³⁵ I have seen a wicked and ruthless man
flourishing like a luxuriant native tree,
³⁶ but he soon passed away and was no more;
though I looked for him, he could not be found.

³⁷ Consider the blameless, observe the upright;
a future awaits those who seek peace.^[d]

³⁸ But all sinners will be destroyed;
there will be no future^[e] for the wicked.

³⁹ The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD;
he is their stronghold in time of trouble.

⁴⁰ The LORD helps them and delivers them;
he delivers them from the wicked and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.



I know the plans I have for you (1)

I'm sure you know *Jeremiah 29:11* well: *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.”* I hope this series of four messages may help a young person you know.

It is good to offer our lives to God and many people have a vocation they know they want to pursue, sometimes from a young age. But many others don't and Jeremiah 29:11 can be used to suggest that we need to discover or work out what that vocation should be; what God's plan for our life is.

This can put a lot of pressure on us, especially if He seems silent. We may pray for God to tell us what He wants us to do and seek advice looking for the one thing we are supposed to do with our life in order to remain in His will. There may even be some fear that when we discover it, God is planning to ask us to do something we don't want to do or send us to somewhere we don't want to go.

But let's look at this verse. It is written by Jeremiah, in Jerusalem, and sent as an encouragement to the people in exile in Babylon. It was the promise that after 70 years of exile God would bring His people back to Israel. It was written to a people, not individuals. And these plans would be accomplished by God Himself. He would make them come to pass. The outworking of God's plans was God's responsibility in His time (70years), not the responsibility of the exiles.

God does want you to prosper, do well and succeed. Of course He does; He loves you! But it may not be prosperity by the world's definition, but rather in terms of what is important to God. Because Jeremiah continued (v 12-14): *“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart I will be found by you. I will gather you and bring you back from captivity.”*

God knows the plans He has for you: the future promised in Jeremiah is release from captivity, spiritual maturity and intimacy with God. That is God's plan for your life: freedom and intimate relationship with Him! How great is that! And God Himself has promised to accomplish this in your life. That is your hope and future! All you need to do is have a genuine desire to seek and follow Him.

More tomorrow...

Susan Maiava - TLMNZ Board member and former TLMI Board member.



I know the plans I have for you (2)

Yesterday we reflected on Jeremiah 29:11 and how we can use that verse to put pressure on our young people today to discover “God’s plan for their life”. This may be because there are now so many choices available in our modern world. And when I say that God’s plans involve spiritual intimacy and maturity you may find that frustrating and respond “Yes, I know that, but I want to know what God wants me to do with the “real world” part of my life!

Well it is actually not a secret and it is not that difficult to identify. God has already told us what he wants us to do with our lives:

Love God, love our neighbour, love ourselves, and love our enemies.
Focus on becoming like Christ, with Him as our model and our centre.

Trust in the Lord and do good (Ps 37:3)

Trust God with all our heart and acknowledge him in whatever we do (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8)

Worship God by using our talents to nurture, encourage and empower others and help them flourish. Live our life with integrity and compassion. Always speak kind, encouraging words. Don’t do things that hurt others such as steal, lie or argue. Forgive others and don’t hold grudges. Grow in our internal life to overcome things such as jealousy, complaining, judging, fear and worry. Replace these with love and generosity of spirit, led by the Holy Spirit who lives in us. Pray, read, learn and keep close to God, lean and depend on Him for our help. Be open and obedient to what He asks us to do today. Follow the desires God has placed in our heart. Be fully human and enjoy the abundant life He died for us to have. Do all this creatively, using our talents, because we are made in the image of a creative God.

You can tweak this list. Perhaps you have your own verses that give you guidance or insight. And then do all this (“in all your ways acknowledge Him”) and God will make straight your paths (Prov 3:6).

We’ll talk more tomorrow....

Susan Maiava - TLMNZ Board member and former TLMI Board member.



I know the plans I have for you (3)

In Part 1 I tried to make the point that you do not need to worry about discovering “God’s plan for your life”. He has it all in hand and is working it out with you. How can you tell? Look back and see what He has done for you already and where he has taken you already.

Yesterday I listed my summary of God’s plan for our lives. And it was more spiritual than practical because although God cares about what you do, He cares a lot more about how and why you do it; your attitudes and motivations.

So trust God to guide you in paths of righteousness (Ps 23:3). Go ahead and live your life in relationship with God, doing what you know is the right thing to do today, not under the pressure to find the one perfect plan. In fact I do not think there is such a thing. It is not that God doesn’t care what you do with your life – of course He does – but trust Him to make it all work out.

Still frustrated because you want a concrete answer? Consider *Psalms 37:3-4*

*“Trust in the Lord and do good,
Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture
Delight yourself in the Lord
And He will give you the desires of your heart”*

This passage can be read two ways: God will give you whatever you want (the wrong way to read it) or He will give you the desires themselves. That is, as a result of first dwelling with and delighting in the Lord, He will give you desires, hope, vision, talents, passion and direction. God will plant His desires in your heart. Then you will know what you want to do.

Don’t be afraid God will want you to go somewhere or do something you don’t want to. He is not like that. If He wants you to go or do, He will give you the desire and passion to go there or do that. You will want to do it.

If you delight in God, His plans for your life will unfold. But you may only see them looking back.

A final note tomorrow...



I know the plans I have for you (4)

Now I don't want you to think, as a result of the last three days, that the answer is just to wait for God to implement His plans for your life. No, we are in life together with Him and He trusts us and expects us to be useful in the service of His Kingdom.

Consider the *parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30)* and how little instruction is actually given by the landowner, except that he entrusted his property to his servants. We are entrusted to be creative and use our initiative as well as our talents!

Are you a tightrope Christian? Always trying to walk God's tightrope, being careful not to tip off to the left or right. Do you think of God as being very prescriptive about how you should live your life?

Or do you see us as being in a playground? Yes there are boundaries and rules to keep us safe, but we are free to play on the swing, slide or round-about; to run, skip and jump. We are free to choose.

There is great freedom in Christ to use our talents and follow our passions. God has opened up a wide range of possibilities to us. To be Christian is to be fully human, in all our diversity and creativity; to be more creative, not less, and I believe God delights in that.

With a tightrope we are always worried about falling off. With the idea of one perfect plan for our life we are concerned about getting it wrong and missing God's will. But in a playground we are free to play confidently with imagination, to have fun and enjoy life. What joy!

Now you may think my analogy is a bit frivolous. Playgrounds are for children. But remember Jesus said we should become like children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven! (Matt 18:3)

Here is a "news story" to finish with:

Man, 91, Dies waiting for the will of God

Walter Houston, described by family members as a devoted Christian, died Monday after waiting seventy years for God to give him clear direction about what to do with his life. "He hung around the house and prayed a lot, but just never got that confirmation," his wife Ruby says. "Sometimes he thought he heard God's voice, but then he wouldn't be sure, and he'd start the process all over again."

Houston, she says, never really figured out what his life was about, but felt content to pray continuously about what he might do for the Lord. Whenever he was about to take action he would pull back, "because he didn't want to disappoint God or go against Him in any way," Ruby says. "He was very sensitive about always remaining in God's will. That was primary for him." Friends say they liked Walter, though he never seemed to capitalise on his talents. "Walter had a number of skills he never got around to using," says long-time friend Timothy Burns. "He worked very well with wood and had a storyteller side to him too. I always told him, 'Take a risk. Try something new,' but he was too afraid of letting the Lord down." (Joel Kilpatrick as quoted by Kevin DeYoung in 'Just do something' 2009, p75).

I hope these four days have helped you.



God's peace with condition

One of the problems we face today is that many people (Christians also) do not have and enjoy peace in their life. People are struggling with different kinds of problems in their life. Many have wealth but no peace. Some of them are not able to sleep properly because they have no peace in their life. Lack of peace drives many people to mental and health problems. Some of them are trying to find peace in different ways, according to their belief.

As a Christian we know that peace is a very important part of our Christian life. Jesus is called "Prince of peace" and *John 14:27 Jesus says.... Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you.* 1st Corint.7:15... God has called us to live in peace. Roman 1:1 Peace to you from God our father. We find in many places in the Bible that God has promised peace to us and we are asked to live in peace with each other. Out of other fruits of the spirit (Gal.5:22) we must also fruit of PEACE in our life. The reality of our life is that we are lacking peace in our life and therefore we are unhappy with our present situation.

While reading a relevant passage of Christ's birth some years ago around Christmas time, I read the message of Angels to shepherds very carefully. I realized that peace is also promised in the very last verse of the message of Angels (Luke 2:14 NIV) and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests also (Harper study Bible)..... peace among men with whom he is pleased.

But then when we think deeper and realize that we do not feel and enjoy this peace in our present life. Why NO PEACE? We find the answer to this very quickly in the last wording of the verse..... **to whom God is pleased.** Then we realized that peace from God is promised to us but with the condition that we have to find favour from God, in other words God is to be pleased with our present life style. The question immediately comes to our mind, and then why we do not enjoy peace, probably because God is not pleased with our present life.

We as Christians must have peace in our present life and we must enjoy this peace. But we find there is no peace or very little peace we have and do not enjoy it. This makes very clear that we are not fulfilling the condition..... that we are not pleasing God by our life.

Then it becomes very important to check our present life pattern and look into those things, that God is not pleased with us. Some of them could be:

- Not trusting & loving God and following His commands. (not practicing Christ's teachings)
- Not being thankful to God and not having a prayerful life.
- Having a sinful nature and still living a sinful life.
- Have not asked forgiveness for our sins and not assured that our sins are forgiven.
- Holding grudges against people around us, having bitterness and not forgiving them.
- We are self-righteous/ dishonest/ Hypocrites/judgmental /selfish nature

We need to ask God to grant us wisdom and strength to overcome these shortcomings of our life and remove all these. Our aim must be to live such a practical Christian life which will please God. Finally we will enjoy PEACE in our life.



Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Allan Ekstedt	6,8 December		Gen 37-50	17 December
Anne-Claude Jonah	1 December		Deut 7,7	7 December
Christine Osman	14, 15 December		Psalms 25-32	7 January
Dan Izzett	2 Dec , 7 January		Psalms 37	8 January
Doug Briggs MD	2, 3, 4 January		Psalms 37,3-4	11 December
Eddie Askew	28 December		Psalms 119, 9-11	1 January
Heather Smith	9 December		Psalms 119,17-24	2 December
James Barnett	17 December		Isaiah 25,7	10 December
Jannine Ebenso	26 December		Isaiah 40, 1-9	11 December
Jo-Anne Thomson	5 January		Jeremiah 29,11	9 January
Joyce Missing	27 December		Jonah	1 January
Kathleen Gavin	30 December		Malachi 3,3	23 Dec
King David	11 Dec, 7, 8 Jan		Matth 1,18-19	14,15 December
Linda Todd	19, 20, 21, 22 December		Matth 1,18-23	28 December
Marta Risko	5,7,12,13 Dec		Matth 13,43	4 January
Mary, mother of Jesus	18 December		Matth 13,45-46	29 Dec
Mollie Clark	24 December		Matth 20,1-34	27 December
Otto Kingsley	31 Dec, 1 Jan		Matthew 24,36-44	30 December
Pat Adlam	25 December		Matth 25, 14-30	12 December
Paul du Plessis Dr	16 December		Mark 1,32-39	6 December
Pete Garratt	6 January		Luke 1,26-38	12, 13 Dec
Peter Lauscher	10 December		Luke 1,30-33	16 December
Pradeep and Sarah Failbus	13 January		Luke 1,46-55	18 December
Priest Zechariah	4 December		Luke 1,46-66	19,20,21,22 Dec
Ruth Butlin Dr	29 December		Luke 1,67-79	4 January
Silvano Perotti	3 December		John 14,27	13 January
Susan Maiava Dr	9, 10, 11, 12 Jan		John 14	9 January
			John 17,11	5 January
			John 17, 20-23	8 January
			Acts 2,44	6 January
			1 Cor 4,2	3 January
			2 Cor 9,15	26 January
			Phil 3,10	2, 3 January
			1 Thess 5,18	5 January
			John 17, 20-23	8 January