



TLM Daily Devotions

from 14 January 2017 on





Immanuel – God with us!

Have you ever thought about how different your life is when you are alone, versus when you are connected deeply to others?

We all face difficult challenges, such as issues in marriage, relationships, parenting and work. That is a normal part of life. But when we are disconnected from the support and love of others, we lose energy, become discouraged, and tend to repeat old behaviors that don't work.

On the more positive side of life, we all have passions and dreams as well, such as a great family or a fulfilling career. Yet accomplishing those dreams will be accelerated or decelerated by whether we are working on them alone, or are accompanied by support.

Life is simply better when we are with others, and worse when we are isolated.

God designed us to be connected, and life breaks down when we are not.

Relationship is the very fuel of our existence and path. And this is not only true in our human connections, but with God Himself as well. The name given to Jesus in the Christmas story is wrapped up in this idea:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they will call Him 'Immanuel' (which means "God with us"). Matthew 1:23

To be "with" means "on the same side." It signifies that someone is present with you, has your back, is accompanying you, and wants to help you in every way. Jesus' birth announcement provided another name for Him, to convey an idea of hope to us. It is that not only is God the Creator and the Sustainer of life, He is also present. He is deeply and intimately connected in relationship to you. He knows your struggles and your dreams, and walks with you through them.

Think how much better life is with the right safe people in your life. Then think how much better life is than this, when you allow yourself to experience the "with" of Jesus. This Christmas season, spend time with Him and ask Him to visit you and be *with* you in a way that brings you ever closer to Him. God bless you.

(Original post by John Townsend for FaithGateway.)



Christmas – Incarnation and transformation

Mathew 2, 1-12

Writing this two days after the Epiphany I wonder whether the Christmas crib and the baby Jesus really help us. It is pleasant to think about the Herald Angels who sing « glory to the new born King » but that is not enough.

This year I made a new connexion. The three kings, or the « wise men, » are neither kings nor are they really defined as wise. They are called Magi in English or Magoi which is the Greek word μάγοι. It means what it sounds like - « magicians. » If we know the Bible and its background really well, there are some good surprises. The Gospel writers were adept at the background to what they wrote, though it easy enough to see why translators into English preferred the incorrect « kings » or « wise men. »

The New Testament does not like magic. In *Acts 13* Paul and Barnabas preached before the pro-consul Sergius Paulus but « Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith » (verse 8). The Gospels, written quite late in the first century, present a well reflected interpretation of events. It seems likely that the real meaning of the story of the three visitors is not just about a baby in a manger. It is about the new order brought into effect by the Incarnation. In the New Testament, the word magos is only used in Mathew's story of the nativity and that of Elymas.

That is not « special pleading » because St Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the Ephesians about twenty years after Mathew wrote his Gospel. In paragraph 19 he writes of the star that was brighter than all the other stars, about how all magic and malice were abolished and ignorance fragmented. Instead there would be eternal life (Romans 6 v. 4) and God had decided that this should happen. The perceptions of the first Christians were more substantial than sometimes we realise.

Of course, Mathew seems to say that the magicians came and worshipped - but that may be because they knew that the art of magic had been superseded by the incarnation, which engages neither magic nor superstition. The incarnation is an example of solid experience that gives rise to serious thought. That is a bit different, but it is much more convincing than the « nativity set » in the shop window.

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.



A love story

And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. Isaiah 42:16

TLM started with a love story. In 1866, when he was only 20 years old, Wellesley Bailey set out to make his fortune in the gold fields of Australia when Ireland was going through hard economic times and local work was difficult to find. But he was in love! And we can imagine that the parting with his childhood sweetheart Alice was not easy.

Alice had a deep love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and she was concerned that Wellesley did not share this. No doubt he was familiar with going to Church (who wasn't in those days) - but there is a big difference between being in the habit of going to Church and giving your life to Jesus Christ. So as they parted Alice asked Wellesley to promise to attend Church whenever he could. Wellesley was in love: he wanted to please Alice, so readily agreed.

What happened next is well documented: while Wellesley was waiting to set sail from Gravesend (near London) he fulfilled his promise to Alice, went to church – and it changed his life. His love for Alice had introduced him to the love of our Lord Jesus, and Wellesley gave his life to Christ kneeling in the cabin of his ship. God had touched his hear through the verse above from Isaiah.

The Australia trip was a disaster. He failed to make his fortune and returned home, but he wanted to do something, so 3 years later he travelled to India to join his brother in the police force. When he arrived it was clear that you cannot do police work till you can speak the local language, so better attach yourself to a mission school and get stuck in. Thus he ended up in Ambala in the Punjab.

It was here for the first time that he met face to face with a group of people who had leprosy and was so deeply moved that he wrote in his journal “If ever there was a Christ-like work in the world it was to go among these poor sufferers and bring them the consolation of the Gospel”.

His love for Alice brought Wellesley to know the love of Jesus; and his love for Jesus now overflowed towards people with leprosy, and that Christ-like love has been at the heart of our work ever since – or at least it should be!

Hopefully everyone reading this will already know the story of Wellesley Bailey and the founding of the Mission. But it's good to be reminded of it as it holds a challenge for all of us. We cannot avoid questions like “Why do we do this work? Is it out of love for Jesus? Is it out of compassion for people who are often so very vulnerable? Or is it just another job – or even a step up the career ladder?”

Wellesley Bailey found his calling to serve people with leprosy only after he had found the love of Jesus. I think the key lies here. We will no doubt be able to show more love to those we serve when we experience more of Jesus' love for us. His love received is our fuel.

It started with a love story – and that's the only way to continue!

Trevor Durston

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



“This is my story....” – 1.

“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy...” Matthew 10, 8

Once upon a time a primary schoolgirl saw a television programme which portrayed nuns teaching deaf children. She was moved to pray, “Lord, let me do something like this when I am older, I too want to help handicapped people “. A few years later, at Sunday School she heard about Albert Schweitzer and identified with his feeling that “in youth I have received so much of good things- health, education, knowledge of the gospel, secure family life- that I should give back something in service to the world. When she was a teenager attending a Church Youth Club, she watched a film about The Leprosy Mission from which she learnt that only a small proportion of the people affected by leprosy were receiving medical care for their disease, and was shocked that -in the twentieth century- a treatable disease should go untreated while the people developed disability as a result.

Being a serious youngster, she immediately wrote to the Mission to say she hoped to work for them in future, and received a kind letter promising to send her regular information about the Mission’s work for her to read as she prepared herself by going to university. At medical school she took every opportunity to learn about leprosy, but also about Christ and about missionary work, and was encouraged by those senior to her in the Christian community. But after years had passed and she had seen other openings beckoning to a newly qualified doctor she considered alternatives spheres of service, nearer to home, such as “general practice in a rundown Welsh valley”.

At a Christian medical fellowship conference the young doctor heard a talk on the problem of making career decisions: the speaker said, in this country there are many Christian doctors, whereas in some other countries there are few of them but there is much more need for their services. The Lord would like to send many of His servants where there is much work to be done. Before considering any post in UK, I suggest any young Christian doctor should ask the Lord, should I offer for overseas service in a needy area? For some the answer will be, No, you are to work here. For others the answer will be, Go. So she thought about it, and it seemed the Lord said, you are fit to go, you have no-one dependent on you, no financial burden hampers you, why not go to The Leprosy Mission and offer your services? And she did just that. The godly leaders of the Mission said she needed more preparation but they could arrange for it.

Her resolve to do her best for her Lord strengthened by the trust put in her by the Mission’s senior staff, in 1982 she took her leave of family and friends and home, then set out for India. She carried His instructions in her heart: *“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, cast out demons. You received without cost; give without charge” (New English Bible, Matthew 10 v.8).*

Many years later, she cannot claim to have raised any dead nor cast out any demons except perhaps, in some measure, resurrecting dead hopes and casting out demonic fear of illness. But she has no regrets about obeying the God-given impulse to dedicate her life to serving her Lord amongst the sick and those affected by leprosy. And she still feels she has not “given” a fraction as much as she has “received” in this life.

This is my story, but it is also the story of God preparing one small item of the human resources He needed to carry out work that needed to be done in His world.

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



The Tug of Conscience

There were two brothers who were an embarrassment to their parents because they were always stealing things and were notoriously troublesome. After trying everything else they knew to get their son straightened out, the parents decided to take them to their pastor for counselling and possibly deliverance. The pastor decided to have a one-on-one with the boys, beginning with the younger. For a while, he sat face to face with the boy. After what seemed an eternity of silence, he asked, looking straight into the boy's eyes;

"Where is God?" No answer. Looking very tough, he repeated the question;

"Where is God?" The boy, though still silent was visibly shaken and terrified.

Frustrated at the boy's refusal to engage in meaningful conversation, the Pastor angrily raised his voice and screamed; *"For the last time boy, I ask you, Where is God?"*

To his amazement, the boy suddenly jumped out of his chair and ran all the way home. Getting home, he jumped up the stairs and made straight for his brother's room. Panting, he shut the door and blurted out; *'We are in big trouble'*. 'And what is that?' *the elder brother replied*. 'God is missing,' *said the younger brother*, 'and everyone, including the Pastor thinks we stole Him. I know I didn't but did you?'

According to Uthman Dan Fodio, conscience is an open wound; only the truth will heal it. Scriptures tell us in *Proverbs 28:1 that the wicked flees when no man is pursuing him but the righteous is as bold as a lion*. Transparency is the strength of credible leadership. Those who live their lives in the open fear no exposure. Paul the apostle spoke extensively in his writings about a conscience void of offence, subject to scrutiny without any fear of what might be the outcome.

The prophet Samuel stood before the entire Israeli nation and challenged them openly, *"...whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hands have I received any bribe...? and I will restore it to you."* To which the people replied. *'You have not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither have you taken anything out of any man's hand.'* That is a leadership lesson that needs to be taught to every TLM servant! Jesus Christ exemplified it when He said that the prince of this world came to him and found nothing in him!

Conscience connects us with our deepest spiritual essence. Conscience is the umpire between morality and legality, between the needful and the lawful. When the voice of conscience is stifled, values become subordinated to convenience. When that happens, there are no longer moral absolutes. Jungle law prevails. The line between good and evil is not only blurred but often obliterated. In such atmosphere, development is not sustainable.

Core values are the compass of conscience. When conscience leaves the driver's seat in anyone or our organization, core values are the first casualty. When the plug of conscience is pulled in leadership, there is no rein on executive excesses. A dead conscience simply justifies evil outcomes with the Machiavellian dictum *"the end justifies the means"* or as Wole Soyinka puts it so beautifully in his book *Madmen And Specialists*; *"the end justifies the meanness"* It's about getting results even if ethics become casualty and others suffer excruciatingly in the process. Before you take the next action, submit your conscience to the Rotary Four-Way Test of the things we think, say or do. Is it the TRUTH? Is it FAIR to all concerned? Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS? Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned? You can sum all that up in this; will it honour God?

This story I used with permission from my mentor, which I would like to share with all of us.



Misunderstandings

When in prison John heard what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, and lepers (those with leprosy) are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.

Matt 11:2-6

There are many things we can think about from these verses.

The one I would like to touch on is misunderstanding.

Most in Israel, at this time, had one expectation of a Messiah – he would rescue them – not from sin but from their 'enemies' particularly the oppressive Roman occupation.

One can imagine John, sitting in his prison, thinking "what's going on? I thought Jesus was the Messiah, but nothing is changing, everything around me is the same"

And so he sends his disciples to Jesus.

Jesus' reply indicates that he is fulfilling prophesy from the scriptures – prophesy about the Messiah – *"the blind will receive their sight"* (Is 61:2, 29:18,19, 35:5,6)

Yes the Messiah would save his people, but in a spectacularly different and more amazing way than from human enemies. John clearly had misunderstood that what Jesus was doing was revealing that he was the Messiah.

Misunderstandings happen in many different ways.

My sister rang to tell me of a sign she had seen outside a church

"Our Sundays are better than Maccas". Alex and I had a laugh and thought no more of it.

Then, somehow, we realized we had thought about it very differently.

Here in Australia we usually call the MacDonald hamburger chain 'Maccas'.

We also have a radio program early on Sunday mornings called 'Sunday with Macca'

Yes you guessed – I thought the sign meant Our Sundays are better than Maccas (ice cream) Sundaes. Alex had thought it meant Our Sundays are better Maccas on the radio.

Just a small thing I know. But here were two people from the same culture, religion and church background, similar education, age etc. etc. – in fact the only real difference was one male and one female!

Yet we came to such very different conclusions from the same six little words!!

Misunderstandings are so easy.

If you are struggling with something someone has said, *why not check with them*, they may have meant something very different and be quite distressed to know they had upset you.

If someone starts to act out of character, *check with them*, maybe they have misunderstood something you have said.

And if you are married – be very alert - six little words can mean such different things. But first be like John and take your concern to Jesus.

Lord Jesus, we ask that your Holy Spirit would be with us today in such a way that all we do and say would be good and lovely and honoring to you. Help us to speak clearly, kindly and with compassion, and help us to hear what is actually being said. Amen.

Pam Packett. Pam and Alex have been involved with The Leprosy Mission in PNG, Tanzania and Australia. Currently Pam is on TLMA National Council and TLMI Board and they both lead the local TLMA Support Group.



“When I awake I am still with you”

Psalm 139

In Britain and Europe, and countries beyond, we reflect on the fact that exactly a century ago our nations were involved in ‘The Great War’, from July 1914 to November 1918, with dreadful conditions, awful loss of life and devastating consequences on all sides. Today in France and Belgium some marks of that war remain: trenches, craters, danger areas and, of course, cemeteries and memorials.

I have visited some of those and have been particularly moved by the inscribed names of thousands who have no known grave, -and I’ve been touched by the many gravestones marking their unidentified remains. In French cemeteries such graves are marked with a simple cross and the one word “*Inconnu*”, -unknown. On German graves the words are, “*Ein unbekannter Deutscher Soldat*” -an unknown German Soldier. But British and Commonwealth stones say something more: “*A Soldier of the Great War...Known unto God*”. It reminds me of words in the Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus 44, “*...some there be, who have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never been;*” (v.9)... “*Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name lives for evermore.*” (v.14). So in what sense are these loved ones ‘*inconnu*’? 100 years on, in whose mind and heart does their name ‘*live for evermore*’? Whether they have a grave or not, what can we believe about lives lost, then or now? What sense can we make of the sheer fragility of human life which touches all of us? Is there anything beyond, to which we can reach out?

There is something deeply insightful about those words “*known unto God*”. Psalm 139 says: “*Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*” The Psalm speaks of the loving intimacy with which God fashions our bodies; it is the love of a father who feels beneath his hand his unborn child moving within its mother. “*...when I was woven together in the depths of the earth your eyes saw my unformed body;*” Does such love end in the cold anonymity of an unmarked grave? No. “*All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.... when I awake I am still with you.*” This is the God epitomised in the desolation of Michelangelo’s *La Pietà*, with the death of his Son, -but he is also the Father who has the final word in resurrection and an eternal perspective.

So for the humanly unanswerable questions raised in any thoughtful mind, I find refuge in God, who over-arches the human predicament, -God, to whom those ‘unknown’ lost are *fully known*, who knew the number of their days before one of them came to be, who holds that child in his everlasting, loving, parental arms. He is the same God who created our inmost being and by whom we are deeply known even when we feel unknown, and who finds us when we are missing and lost. So we may say, confidently, with the Psalmist, “*When I awake, I am still with you*”.

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



Confused language

I chuckled when I noticed that our monthly collection of devotions is called “The Bridge”, as Cape Town is notoriously the city of “Bridges to nowhere”. A highway was built at the Foreshore in 1977, but bridges which would have completed the project were abandoned. Forty years later, they serve as a reminder of Robert Burn’s phrase “The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men / Gang aft a-gley.”

Closer to my home, a bridge over the highway, also built in the 1970s, serves no purpose other than to house a speed-camera. I know this because... Next door to me a short highway ends abruptly in a dirt track – a rumour that Cape Town would host the Olympic Games prompted the city fathers to build new roads. When the rumour proved false, they dumped the project.

Now there is something good about these incomplete highways and bridges. If you’ve been sailing on Saturday instead of preparing your sermon, the “highways to nowhere” are wonderful last-minute sermon fodder. I think you’d be hard-pressed to find a preacher in Cape Town who does not have this topic on their speed-dial. Those of us of a certain vintage may recall that Jim Reeves recorded a song with this title.

I don’t know what texts come to your mind, but one that occurs to me is *Genesis 11:7*

“Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

Projects go wrong because we no longer “have one language and the same words”. An airport costing £200 million was completed on the Island of St Helena during 2016, but it is too dangerous to use it and the service between the Island and South Africa shows no signs of taking-off. A friend of mine worked on the island and assures me that the fluky winds are common knowledge.

In the Leprosy Mission, working across languages and cultures, we are well-attuned to the pitfalls of confused language, but in my experience, those differences are insignificant compared to the confusion that arises between people who share the same language and background – or is my marriage just different?

During today’s devotions, let’s think about what we can do to improve our understanding.

You may find this pattern useful:

Listen to God

Isaiah 55:3

Listen to your sisters and brothers

James 1:19

Hear what others are saying

Proverbs 16:20

When we speak, let’s speak His truth into the situation

Matthew 18:15

“Father, communication sounds so easy, but it so often trips me up – badly. I don’t want a life full of broken bridges. I don’t want to travel on a highway to nowhere. Help me to ask -and speak- everything according to Your will.”

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.



Psalm 3

A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom.

¹ LORD, how many are my foes!
How many rise up against me!

² Many are saying of me,
“God will not deliver him.”^[b]

³ But you, LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.

⁴ I call out to the LORD,
and he answers me from his holy mountain.

⁵ I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.

⁶ I will not fear though tens of thousands
assail me on every side.

⁷ Arise, LORD!
Deliver me, my God!
Strike all my enemies on the jaw;
break the teeth of the wicked.

⁸ From the LORD comes deliverance.
May your blessing be on your people.



Moses. A story of adoption (1).

Exodus 2:1-10

Moses was an adopted child and this determined the course of his entire life. Like all adopted children, Moses began to realise one day that he did not have the same features as his mother, that his biological parents had been unable to care for him, that he was different from other children in his peer group. He had probably been circumcised and who was his father anyway? Fortunately, Moses' biological parents had loved him with all their hearts, had nurtured him at his own mother's breast and he had been adopted into a family of high status. But inevitably, like all adopted children, the time came that he started to ask questions about his origin and his identity: Who am I really? It is a question every adolescent will ask: Please tell me who I am! ⁱ Because, of course, our identity is determined to a large extent by how others see us and include us – our family, our ethnic group, our friends. No, Moses did not find all the answers he needed and he was strong enough to go over to the Hebrews and look for answers there; to enter the ghetto where the culture was so different, characterised by raising cattle and a different religion; a place where people were suppressed and exploited.

Moses the Egyptian

We know no details about Moses' life as an Egyptian prince. But when we observe his actions so many years later, we get a pretty good idea of the education he got and how he had been prepared for leadership. Moses could read and write (Ex 24:4), arranged the Israeli camp as he had been trained back home (Num 2), used Egyptian techniques to design the portable tabernacle and transport the materials on ox carts (Num 7). Just as in Egypt, he used silver trumpets to assemble the people (Num 10) ⁱⁱ. Moses had juridical insight and knew that rules were needed for a people to live together. He knew that it was important to obtain consensus to get laws accepted (Ex 24:3-4) and that, once accepted, they had to be strictly enforced (Num 15). Of course, this was only possible because these laws had been given by God and expressed his holiness. But that revelation had not bypassed Moses' heart and mind. God had carefully prepared his servant to have a central role in shaping the lifestyle of this people that God had chosen to be sanctified unto Him. Moses ruled, but his modesty and dependence upon God distinguished him from an Egyptian Pharaoh.

When we see how Moses' regains control of the anarchy following the worship of the golden calf (Ex 32:25-29), we realise he must have learned early on in Egypt to take drastic action when required. He must have been familiar with the way rulers and authorities reasoned there. That is why he could meet the Pharaoh on equal terms and negotiate the departure of the Hebrews (Ex 5-12).

And so we learn that God can take all that we have learned through our education and upbringing and use it for the realization of his kingdom, if only we surrender our hearts and minds to him. We see this confirmed throughout church history, e.g. in the lives of the apostle Paul, of Tertullian, Augustine, Luther, Calvin... Even today, there are examples of people who similarly allowed God to transform their thinking and their actions.

Johan Velema headed TLM's Evaluation & Monitoring Service from 1999 to 2007, co-ordinating evaluations of projects and programmes and collecting statistical data from all centres. He did research & development work for TLM International from 2007 to 2011.



Moses. A story of adoption (2).

Exodus 2:11-21

Moses the Hebrew

We are not told whether Moses ever saw his biological parents again. We read that Moses later knew he had an elder brother (Ex 4:14) and that his brother knew about him (Ex 4:27). So there must have been some contact in that first, Egyptian phase of Moses' life. We can surmise that Moses' parents had already passed away by the time he returned from Midian and were not part of the Exodus.

Moses must have seen the family likeness and found an explanation for his uncomfortable identity. We can imagine the loving welcome he received. They had never stopped praying for him and were proud of his successes, even though he was far away from them. Did Moses support them financially? Did he use his influence to protect them? Perhaps. We know that Moses was concerned about the suppression of his people. Brought up an Egyptian and looking like an Egyptian (Ex 2:19), he knew that that did not adequately describe him and that he found what was missing in the Hebrew community.

That realisation made the incident that turned his entire life upside down particularly painful. Moses intervenes in a case of disproportionate violence. He takes the side of the Hebrew against the Egyptian. Did Moses think that the Hebrews would appreciate his help and keep quiet about it? But the next day he discovers that everyone knows what has happened. Even worse, the Hebrews treat him as an outsider who should not meddle in their affairs. It is a bitter experience for Moses. He carries both the Egyptian and the Hebrew identity within himself but suddenly he is no longer welcome in either community and no longer safe. He has to save himself and becomes a refugee.

Moses the Refugee

We know nothing about Moses' escape from Egypt - not what route he took, how he crossed the border or how he hid from Pharaoh's spies. We don't know what transport he used, whether trusted people helped him or whether he paid a lot of money to people smugglers. We find him there, in the Arabian desert, resting at a well (Ex 2:15). He is young and strong and enough of a man to stand up for a bunch of shepherd girls, who are mightily impressed with this brave Egyptian (2:19). The incident demonstrates Moses' natural authority.

And so he comes to the home of Reuel and enters a completely different world. The sort of world he knew from Hebrew stories about their ancestors. The world of semi-nomadic cattle herders living in tents, of harsh desert conditions and feeling infinitely small in all that emptiness. Reuel observed his guest and gave him his trust. Moses was humble enough to accept becoming part of that world. Through his marriage with Zipporah, Moses becomes part of the family. No longer a guest but sharing in the joys and the sufferings of their existence and working together for the interests of the family. Moses experiences first-hand the close family ties within a Semitic clan, where the members support one another materially, emotionally and spiritually and hold on to each other no matter how far apart they may be or for how long they may have been separated (Ex 18, Num 10:29-32).

We may experience moments where all our dreams are shattered e.g. when we lose a job, an accident happens or we experience discrimination or exclusion. Moses' life story shows that even after such involuntary changes of direction, God simply stays with us and continues to shape our lives according to his plans.

Johan Velema headed TLM's Evaluation & Monitoring Service from 1999 to 2007, co-ordinating evaluations of projects and programmes and collecting statistical data from all centres. He did research & development work for TLM International from 2007 to 2011.



Moses. A story of adoption (3).

Exodus 2:21-3:1 / 18:2-4

Moses the Midianite

Moses has found a home, a place of safety and security. With all his difference, he belongs. But it does take getting used to. Many of his Egyptian habits have to be unlearned. He has to learn a new language and appreciate different foods. In Egypt there was plenty of cereal, fruits and vegetables (Num 11:5, 20:5), whereas in Midian meat and milk were far more important. As a special blessing, Moses is able to have intelligent conversation with his father in law and the many guests he receives. His wife, her sisters (Ex 2:16) and her brother (Num 10:29) teach him the Midianite customs. When his first son is born we see something of the struggle this was for Moses. He calls him Gershom, stranger. It shows that for all the love shown to him, Moses still feels a stranger, different.

Moses must have felt deeply frustrated because he could not do anything anymore against the suppression of the Hebrew people. He keeps his ear to the ground for news from Egypt, brought by the travelling merchants and their caravans. Thus he hears one day of the demise of the Pharaoh (Ex 2:23) and of his successor, Ramses II. Quite possibly he had known Ramses and could imagine his position in the corridors of power at the Egyptian court. He also hears that the situation for the Hebrews remains unchanged. As for himself, it is obvious he has been forgotten and that nobody is looking for him anymore. He probably was able to pass a message to his biological family to let them know he was safe and his approximate whereabouts. Contact with his adoptive mother would have been too great a risk.

And so several years pass before Moses can say at the birth of his second son: "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh" (Ex 18:4). Only then is he no longer a refugee. Moses accepts his present life and begins to appreciate the positive aspects of it. He seems to have let go of his desire to save his people. As a shepherd he wanders through the desert with his kinsmen. Moses learns to navigate the hills and the plains in every circumstance, always aware of the need to find water. In the harsh environment he unlearns his preference for material wealth and comfort. So many things now seem unnecessary and overly complicated. All things people construct in the urban society lose their meaning and attraction for him. In that infinite emptiness of sun, wind, rocks and sand, Moses finds inner freedom and, almost without meaning to, he grows closer to God.ⁱⁱⁱ It is remarkable that Moses speaks of 'the God of my father' (Ex 18:4). Reuel the priest has helped him to see his life in the perspective of the God that was worshipped by his biological father.

Moses has begun to appreciate the wisdom of his father in law and gain an understanding of God that he had never learned in Egypt in quite the same way.

Moses' willingness to become part of a way of life that was way below his level of sophistication, helps him to find peace and prepares him to meet God. It is the logic of the incarnation: Jesus descended into our reality and so became our saviour. That same logic will also operate in our lives when we decide to follow Jesus.

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ⁱ cf. the song by Supertramp *Logical song* written door Roger Hodgson, 1979.

ⁱⁱ T.D. Alexander, D.W. Baker (Editors). Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch. IVP 2003. ISBN 978-0830817818

ⁱⁱⁱ T.E. Lawrence. Seven pillars of wisdom. chapter III. Penguin Books. ISBN 9780141182766.



Moses. A story of adoption (4).

Exodus 3:1-12

Meeting with God

Moses ends up as a shepherd of sheep wandering around in the desert where he finds inner peace and grows closer to God. After learning so much in Egypt, Moses now has to unlearn many things again while God is changing him and building his character. And then, as if by divine appointment, this mysterious and overwhelming meeting takes place that Moses had not been seeking but that simply happened to him (Ex 3). A meeting in which his identity and destiny become clear. A meeting in which God tells Moses who He himself is, but also who he, Moses, is. First there is this image of those burning bushes which do not turn to ashes. It speaks of God's holiness and of how he needs nothing and no one to exist. Second, God touches Moses deeply when he says: I am the God of your father and of your Hebrew ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (3:6). With this, God connects Moses with his Hebrew origin. He reaches out to Moses across all the misunderstandings that surround his identity and accepts him as part of his chosen people. From this point on, God's call defines who Moses is, more than his Egyptian youth or his Midjanite middle years. Thirdly, God touches Moses' desire to alleviate the suffering of his people – this fire that had burned so brightly in the past but had now all but gone out. God revives that fire and says: No that was not wrong and it was not a mistake. I share that compassion. In fact, My compassion existed before you were born and I now give you the opportunity to have a key role in the liberation of my people. I put that desire in your heart. I created you and prepared you for just that task. All that has happened will now come together.

We may well ask why Moses had so many objections. Kneeling down on holy ground, he could not doubt the reality of what was happening. Rather, he was unsure about his own abilities and about what would happen if he took this story to the people around him. In this heart-to-heart with God, God makes Moses a spiritual leader: Someone with a vision (3:12), someone who knows God and can speak of him (3:14-15), someone who can access God's supernatural power (4:1-9). At this point Moses brings up his language ability (4:10). Was he worried that people would hear that Hebrew was not his mother tongue? Had his Egyptian language gone rustyⁱⁱⁱ? Or was he simply a man of few words? Certainly Moses would have great difficulty relating both to the Hebrews, who had always considered him an outsider, and to the Egyptians for whom he had become an outcast. He was to go to Egypt without a clearly defined position or status, without the privileges he had enjoyed in the past. How could he achieve anything? Moses went to Egypt with nothing but the knowledge that God sent him and had promised to support him.

If God calls us to do something new, we may rightly feel honoured and privileged. Fortunately, we can discuss all the difficulties we see with God. However, God's work is done in God's way. It is not by our human strength, ability or position that we can achieve the goals that God has set before us. This will become even more clear as we read the rest of the story.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary. online e.g. www.Biblehub.com



Moses. A story of adoption (5).

Exodus 3:16-20

Slaves in Egypt

We know that poverty and suppression affect the physical and mental health of people. It destroys their sense of dignity and self-worth when people are forced again and again to do the things they hate. Where people lack the resources to produce or buy good food and lack the time to care for themselves, disease becomes more prevalent. We also know that where people no longer have hope, resignation sets in and they will no longer take action to improve their situationⁱⁱⁱ. The Hebrews that Moses encountered on his return to Egypt had suffered for too long and were but a shadow of the defiant shepherd people that trekked into Egypt 400 years earlier. They lived in their ghetto called Goshen and at regular intervals the younger and stronger were taken away to do forced labour elsewhere in Egypt. Many of the old customs had worn off and been replaced by the innovations that the highly developed Egyptian society had to offer. It was clear that in their present state, the Hebrews were never going to free themselves. The moral strength required had been beaten out of them. Even after they have left Egypt, we see this in the way people complained when things took a less fortunate turn. "If only we had stayed in Egypt!" they would say (Ex 5:21, 14:12, Num 14:2-4, 20:3-5), rather than steeling themselves and facing and solving the problems.

Disasters

Together Moses and Aaron return to Egypt (Ex 4:29). Two older men who can speak to the elders of the Hebrew community and speak to Pharaoh on their behalf. It is not surprising, however, that soon after the first confrontation, Moses finds himself alone (Ex 6:9). Things turned out just as badly as he had foreseen at the burning bush and now he needed God to support him. And God does, indeed, realise the scenario he had painted for Moses (Ex 3:19-20). And every time he assigns to Moses and Aaron an active role. Aaron has to stretch out Moses' staff over the water of the Nile (7:20), or beat on the ground with it (8:16), Moses has to throw soot into the air (9:10) or lift up his hands to the heavens (9:23)... We rarely ask ourselves how it must have affected Moses to actively bring so much tragedy on the country and its people. He is the intermediate in the titanic struggle between God and Pharaoh. Again and again, Moses takes the struggle to a next level over a period of 2-3 years. With every next disaster, he more becomes to the Egyptians the personification of the calamity and judgement that come over their land. Among the Hebrews, however, every next disaster generates more hope and faith that God is really going to liberate them. When Moses first went Pharaoh, no Hebrew would have been ready to paint blood on his doorposts and get ready to leave. But when Moses in Exodus 12 announces the imminent departure, thousands quite naturally follow his instructions. By then they have seen that what Moses says really happens. Gradually they have begun to give credence to the unbelievable claim that they will leave Egypt and recover their identity. And as they leave, they carry Joseph's bones along as a poignant symbol of their history and identity as the people that God had called (Ex 13:19).

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ⁱⁱⁱ Bryant L. Myers. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. Orbis books. New York, 2011. *Chapter 4*.



Moses. A story of adoption (6).

Exodus 33:7-11

Moses' leadership

We see in Moses' life a unique intimacy with God. Moses spoke with God face to face (Ex 33:11, Num 12:8). He spent a lot of time alone with God on the Sinai (Ex 24:18, 34:28) and in the tent of meeting (33:7-11, 34:34). Moses could express all his personal needs to God (Ex 5:22, 14:15, 17:4, Num 11:11-15); his position and authority were upheld by God over against all his critics (Ex 14:31, Num 12, Num 16); he could even turn God's wrath away on more than one occasion and so prevent total annihilation of his people (Ex 32:7-14, Num 14:11-20, 16:41-50). Moses received special grace so that he could fulfil the task God had called him to do.

We see Moses' leadership as he fights, in continuous dialogue with God, for the liberation of his people; he takes his people through the Sea of Reeds like a military commander would; guided by God and listening to the people, he formulates the laws that govern everyday life and discusses them and writes them down (Ex 24:3-8); he determines the forms of religious rituals and custom; he builds a system of governance by appointing officials (Ex 18) and by assigning a special role to the Levitesⁱⁱⁱ (Lev 25:32-34, Num 1:47-54). Thus the Hebrew people, damaged by suppression and exploitation, recovered their identity and were transformed into a society with a reasonable level of organisation in which there was no place for immorality and in which justice brought peace.

Moses' leadership is self-effacing, without the empty boasting that he had so often seen at the Egyptian court. We really know very few biographical details about Moses' life and family. He lived for his work as the leader of his people. He did not build a dynasty but let his sons merge into the ranks of the ordinary Levites (1 Chron 23:14). That was all part of his spiritual leadership. Moses is a servant of the most high God and will not detract attention away from his Master and His works.

Identity

Under God, Moses played a central role in the creation of the Jewish identity. This started when he led the Hebrews out of Egypt and out of slavery and was shaped further by the laws that the people received from God through Moses and the religious customs that were defined in this way.

That identity has stood for thousands of years and even today helps millions of people to know who they are. Yet, Moses himself initially had the greatest difficulties to know who he was. Only through God's call at the burning bush did his identity and his destiny become clear. Moses had to grow up in Egypt – how else could he ever have become the leader that could speak with Pharaoh at an equal level and lead the Hebrews to freedom? Moses had to tend sheep in the desert – how else could he have developed the spiritual antenna that later enabled him to communicate so intimately with God? Besides, he could never have guided the Hebrews into the desert if he had not known from his own experience that it was possible to survive there.

Moses' personal struggle with his own identity ultimately finds fulfilment in the formation of the Jewish identity. Moses' adoption by the Egyptian princess ultimately finds fulfilment in the adoption of the Jewish people by Yahweh (Ex 4:22, 19:4-6, Dt 32:9-12).

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World Leprosy Day 2017

Lives Transformed

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. - Romans 2:12

Today is World Leprosy Day, a key date in the leprosy world, acknowledged and celebrated in different ways in various parts of the world. In preparing for World Leprosy Day, I took the opportunity to reflect again on our vision statement; 'Leprosy Defeated, Lives Transformed'.

I have grown to really appreciate and value our vision statement; one of the reasons for this being that we can view 'Lives Transformed' in a number of different ways.

As an organisation we work to see the lives of people, families and communities affected by leprosy transformed – to live lives where they receive good leprosy services and care, are included, dignified and empowered.

But transformation can also be extended to those who support us, both financially and with their time – how is what we are doing as an organisation, and of which they are a part, strengthening their relationship with God? Some time back, a man in my home Church in New Zealand shared with me how he came to faith; he and his wife started to support a Christian aid organisation, they then visited the organisation's work in Central America, and so compelled were they by the work, example and values of this organisation they became believers – their lives were truly transformed!

And what about ourselves – how have we been transformed by being part of The Leprosy Mission? I believe that most of us can attest that we are different people now to when we first became associated with the Mission – through the people we have met, the stories we have heard, the fellowship we have shared, and the ways that we have seen God work in our midst.

In writing to the Romans, Paul states that the foundation of transformation of character and conduct comes from a renewed mind. My prayer for us this World Leprosy Day, as we seek to transform the lives of others that we would allow ourselves to be transformed, and in doing so, deepen our relationship and intimacy with the Almighty.

Brent Morgan is International Director, based in Brentford, UK.



Naaman healed of leprosy

2 Kings 5

This is fairly well known story of a man affected by leprosy in the Old Testament. While there have been many uses of this story, I would like to share two questions which struck me on re-reading the story.

First: the passage. On the one side we have Elisha, man of God, inheritor of Elijah's cloak and 'portion'. On the other we have a Naaman, a powerful general of Aram, or as some now translate the region, Syria. My understanding of the background to this is that the tribe of Aram have clearly won victories over the Israelites, bands of their raiders come into the country and capture Israelites and make them their slaves. The king of Israel clearly fears his foreign counterpart. Naaman himself may have killed many Israelites in battle. In fact, *'through him the Lord had given victory to Aram' (2 Kings 5v1)*. However, Naaman has a big problem, he has leprosy.

How often are we like Naaman? Here is a powerful person, who has worked hard. He is proud of his achievements and gifts. He has worked his way up the ranks and now stands in good relationship with the king himself. He controls many things and has influence over a wide area. However one day he realises he cannot even control his own body - his health. He is forced to go humbly to a man of a defeated nation, who serves a foreign god that he doesn't know so that he can beg for his life. That man (Elisha) refuses to even see him, sends a messenger out to meet him and tells him to go wash in a local river to be healed. Naaman is enraged and insulted. I imagine his thoughts: is this the start of stigma that will mark him for life? Does he fear his total loss of status as a fellow human?

My first question is this: Where does our courage come from? For some of us, it might be our competence. I know I often take refuge and pride in my skills - my contributions to life are not small. Naaman's leprosy strikes at his pride and courage in himself. His self-worth is shown to be based on sand, not rock because he cannot, with his money and gifts, buy health and therefore regain control of his life. This is why I believe Elisha is so upset with his servant later, as it allows Naaman to depreciate the fabulous grace shown to him by God. Our skills and our God given health comes to us as a gift we cannot purchase or control. God is in control even as we believe we are in control of our lives, when we depend on our own skills. He is in control when we miss the illusion of our own 'control' too.

What makes the Leprosy Mission any different to the wider world? Certainly not our skills, as there are many skilful people out there, although we are certainly keepers of a wide range of skills. It is good to want to be excellent. We will also be disappointed and discouraged by what we lack - in ourselves, in others and in our environment. All organisations have that. Excellence lifts us. Failures, illnesses and disappointments leave room for grace. Grace from our Father in heaven and grace to each other. Wonderful, un-buyable, inspiring and (to the world) inexplicable grace. There is much excellence outside the body of believers, but not enough grace. I believe you need much courage to show much grace. My second question is this: How can we have both excellence and grace in what we do?

May we have the courage to wear our grace openly and strive to be the best knowing that both 'the best we can be' and 'grace' are from the same source.

Jonathan Tsang - Has worked for TLM International since 2010 as 'the computer guy'.



“This is my story...” – 2.

But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Isaiah 43, 1-5

I was in the middle of nurse training, and wondering what the Lord had for my future. We had enjoyed holidays at the Christian Holiday Crusade at Filey, in the north-eastern part of England for a number of years. Bible teaching was one focus, but also many Christian missions exhibited their work, and encouraged people to learn more, support or even join their cause. I went around the many stalls and found information about the work of TLM, and as at that time it was a medical mission I was interested in learning more. I began to support TLM. I later discovered that my paternal grandmother had supported the work of TLM for many years.

I thought the Lord may be calling me to serve Him abroad, and I thought it would be good to complete midwifery training, and was accepted for the course in Edinburgh, Scotland. I was delighted to meet on my first day, three other nurses from Northern Ireland who were also Christians. There was no Nurses Christian Fellowship at the hospital at the time, so we decided to start one. In order to attract others we organised for a number of speakers to come to talk on some subject which may be of interest, so on one occasion we invited Dr. Tom Sloan to talk to us about the work of TLM. I began to realise that this may be the organisation which the Lord wanted me to join, as my orthopaedic nursing experience may be of use. After completing the midwifery course I found a job as a junior sister at a small cottage hospital near my home in Yorkshire; here I learned how to manage with less up to date facilities as I had been used to, and worked more with General Practitioner doctors than specialist doctors. After 15 months gaining this experience, I decided to apply to TLM. I was accepted, but first I needed to complete a period of “missionary training” at Redcliffe college; a very valuable time learning how to trust God and to get along with other women who were also seeking the Lord’s leading of where they should serve Him. Whenever we faced obstacles or difficulties the phrase used was “it’s good missionary training”!

During the first year of study, I asked that the Lord would put on my heart a desire to pray for the people where he was sending me. Well he did, and it was Bhutan. When I mentioned this to Eddie Askew he informed me that they would not be sending new missionaries there, so I tried to dismiss the idea, but it only grew! I decided it would be good to complete the 2 year course, and the Mission said that was fine, but I would need to find my own funding, which I did from the local education authority! By the end of the first term of my second year I thought I should enquire from the Mission where they planning to send me. My letter crossed in the post with a letter from Eddie asking me to go to the office to discuss my future placement. Imagine my surprise and joy when I met Eddie who asked me if I would be willing to go to Bhutan!!! Of course I said yes and the rest is history! I went in September 1973 and completed the work I was sent to do in July 1991. I could never have imagined a more fulfilling, challenging and character forming experience, and I hope I did some good, despite my many failures.

One thing I do know, the Lord was faithful through it all.

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



Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Brent Morgan	29 January		Genesis 11,7	21 January
David Beazley	20 January		Exode 2,1-10	23-28 January
David, King of Israel	22 January		2 Kings 5	30 January
James Barnett	15 January		Psalms 3	22 January
Jeffrey Tan	14 January		Psalms 139	20 January
Johan Velema Dr	23-28 January		Isaiah 42,16	16 January
Jon Tsang	30 January		Isaiah 43,1-5	31 January
Joyce Missing	31 January		Matthew 1,23	14 January
Pam Packett	19 January		Matthew 2,1-12	15 January
Peter Laubscher	21 January		Matthew 10,8	17 January
Ruth Butlin Dr	17 January		Matthew 11,2-6	19 January
Trevor Durston	16 January		Matthew 18,15	21 January
Yousif Deng Dr	18 January		Romans 2,12	29 January