



TLM Daily Devotions

May 2020



Intro to the month of May

I recently read somewhere a short note: "This year, first time in history of mankind, multimillionaires and the poor will spend their summer holiday in the very same way: staying at home." Truly, due to Covid-19 in many ways we rapidly became similar, we are in the same boat all over the world. But this is very far yet from that oneness what the Scripture describes in the story of the first Pentecost (Acts 2)! Our Babel-world soon would come back to the former stage of broken lines, differences, and above all: spiritual distances.

When if not now should we pray with zeal for, beg for, intervene for a real oneness: that in the Lord?

Let this be our common, onehearted wish and prayer all over TLM all over the world!

Marta

Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

*Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light*

Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

*Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light*

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness

Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine

Fill this land with the Father's glory

Blaze, Spirit, blaze

Set our hearts on fire

Flow, river, flow

Flood the nations with grace and mercy

Send forth your word

Lord, and let there be light



The Perspective of Clouds

I have always been fascinated by the clouds – the formations, the shapes and the colours. When I was up a hill, high or low, I often found a patch of ground where I could lie down and just look at and watch the clouds sometimes apparently still (they are always moving, our eyes just don't detect it) and sometimes moving very fast indeed. Now that I live by the seaside and have the wider perspective I can sit for long periods of time just watching the clouds, and praise our God who created them.

Recently I read about a silent film called "Wings" depicting the air activity of World War I. It won the first Academy Award for Best Picture in 1927. While it was being filmed, the director stopped the filming for a few days. When asked why nothing was being done, he explained that the skies were a clear blue and he needed clouds so that the air conflict could be easily seen in the film. The film needed the perspective that the clouds would bring.

In our lives, we often long for the proverbial "blue skies" we want the good days rather than the difficult times. Yet it is these difficult times (cloudy skies) that bring into perspective the love and faithfulness of our Heavenly Father. We can see this particularly when we look back over our lives or even just over a short period of them. Sometimes we get caught up in the cloudy skies and don't realise that God is still working in those times as well and in due course we can reflect on how He has led us through those days. As I write this the world certainly seems to be full of very "cloudy skies". I am "self-isolating" as much as possible although I still go out for a walk or to buy some shopping. The walk is fine the shopping is a real nightmare as people jostle and grab and fill trolleys to overflowing – will they ever eat /use everything they buy or is it just panic.

Job was like us, when he looked back over his life and his troubled times. But with hindsight he could see God's hand at work *"I have heard of You...but now my eyes see You" (Job 42:15)*. What a contrast to the beginning of the book where he says *"May the day perish on which I was born...may a cloud settle on it" (Job 3:3-5)*.

May God use the cloudy times in our lives to help us to "see" clearly His faithfulness and His work in our lives. Let's pray that God will use these "cloudy days" all around the world to reveal Himself to many who seek comfort and help. In contrast to the greedy buying there are many examples of individuals and indeed groups of people offering help to those who have to self-isolate, whether they realise it or not they are part of God's faithfulness and love for those in need – sometimes just a phone call or an email can make all the difference.

Father, today we pray that these difficult times for many will turn hearts and minds to You and Your love for each one of us. Help us to use this time to reflect on your love and your faithfulness.

"Great is Your faithfulness". Amen



Psalm 33

¹Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.

²Praise the LORD with the harp;
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.

³Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully, and shout for joy.

⁴For the word of the LORD is right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.

⁵The LORD loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love.

⁶By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

⁷He gathers the waters of the sea into jars^{1a};
he puts the deep into storehouses.

⁸Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.

⁹For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.

¹⁰The LORD foils the plans of the nations;
he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.

¹¹But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generations.

¹²Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people he chose for his inheritance.

¹³From heaven the LORD looks down
and sees all mankind;

¹⁴from his dwelling place he watches
all who live on earth—

¹⁵he who forms the hearts of all,
who considers everything they do.

¹⁶No king is saved by the size of his army;
no warrior escapes by his great strength.

¹⁷A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
despite all its great strength it cannot save.

¹⁸ But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
¹⁹ to deliver them from death
and keep them alive in famine.
²⁰ We wait in hope for the LORD;
he is our help and our shield.
²¹ In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.
²² May your unfailing love be with us, LORD,
even as we put our hope in you.



Psalm 34

Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left.

¹I will extol the LORD at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.

²I will glory in the LORD;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

³Glorify the LORD with me;
let us exalt his name together.

⁴I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.

⁵Those who look to him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame.

⁶This poor man called, and the LORD heard him;
he saved him out of all his troubles.

⁷The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
and he delivers them.

⁸Taste and see that the LORD is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

⁹Fear the LORD, you his holy people,
for those who fear him lack nothing.

¹⁰The lions may grow weak and hungry,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

¹¹Come, my children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

¹²Whoever of you loves life
and desires to see many good days,

¹³keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from telling lies.

¹⁴Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.

¹⁵The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are attentive to their cry;

¹⁶but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to blot out their name from the earth.

¹⁷The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles.

¹⁸The LORD is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

¹⁹The righteous person may have many troubles,
but the LORD delivers him from them all;

²⁰he protects all his bones,
not one of them will be broken.

²¹Evil will slay the wicked;
the foes of the righteous will be condemned.

²²The LORD will rescue his servants;
no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.



Delay or denial?

Psalm 27:14 Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

If your Christian walk in anything like mine, you've had times of desperately crying out to God for something, and there's been nothing but resounding silence. Sometimes I have asked for the wrong thing, and so the answer from the LORD is 'no'. Sometimes I have asked for the right thing and HIS answer is an immediate 'yes'. The difficulty comes when I think I have asked for the right thing but it seems like the answer so far is 'no'. Well, with God, delay is not always denial.

In my daily devotions guide recently, I was reminded of the story of Christopher Columbus, the explorer. There he was, somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, with a restive crew threatening mutiny, and no end in sight week after week. Most of that famous voyage across the Atlantic Ocean was mired in problems. He could have given up, but at the end of each day, after much anguished praying, he penned his final log entry: "Today we move westward!" He must have been tempted to give up but eventually he made it to the New World and opened up a whole new continent. Delay is not always denial.

When I lived in Nigeria, I noticed how tasty the bananas are compared to the ones we eat in England. The bananas in Nigeria are allowed to ripen on the tree – then are picked – delicious! Much of the fruit in England is picked too early and then forced to ripen quickly in artificial ways. Many supermarkets tomatoes are picked completely green and unripe so they won't bruise when being transported from the farm to the shop, and then are sprayed with carbon dioxide to turn them instantly red just before they're put on display. In appearance they're fine, but a gas-ripened tomato is no match for one that has been allowed to mature slowly and naturally. We worry how fast we can grow, while God is much more concerned with healthy growth.

Similarly, when God wants to make a mushroom, HE does it overnight, but with Oak trees, HE grows them over a hundred years. Maybe today you need to remember how far you have come, not just how far you have to go. We want immediate fruit in our lives, but healthy growth is usually gradual growth.

Delay is not always denial.

*Lord God Almighty, thank you that you know what's best for me. Guide me as I seek to do YOUR will today. May I know when to wrestle through in prayer and know when to let go.
Amen!*

Jannine Ebenso - Head of Quality Assurance, TLM International Office.

(Adapted from: Choose Life: 356 Readings for Radical Disciples, Simon Guillebaud)



Close or...face to face?

On a brilliant March Saturday morning it was easy to decide and take a refreshing day out to Windsor and Eton, for breathing history... It truly reached the purpose and the day amidst special atmosphere, became not just amazing pleasure, but an inspiration, too, in many senses.

Approaching to the castle standing in all splendour, the flag of the Monarch on full mast topped the view. Powerful... Marking that Her Majesty the Queen was at that time in Windsor, as like a visible trumpet, her huge flag dancing in the wind gave sign about that.

But to check the appropriateness of our supposition we also asked it from one of the nice guards who kindly shared word with us and pointed on the inner part of the court confirming: "Yes, indeed, Her Majesty is staying here, there in that wing! She often does as she likes working here."

It was a special feeling visiting the marvellous medieval castle and all its treasury details knowing that you are certainly under the same roof as Her Majesty the Queen! It does not often happen, in your insignificant life as a foreign commoner, that you find yourself in the same building as one of the most respected persons of recent world! Could she receive us? – we joked. In our backpack-sweater outfit and worn shoes it was funny to imagine. We tried to work out how many metres might separate us and the result was just a few tens! Uplifting.... anyhow, so close... Potentially a few hundreds of steps only...

But in the meantime no chance to see her! And even less chance to meet her face to face! What an exceptional privilege and long protocol precedes this privilege to happen to only a very few commoners in their lifetime... but not for us today, sure! So the feeling of "being so much close" and "under the same roof" soon turned into the realisation of total separateness. A physical proximity does not mean a chance to meet face to face!

But this disappointment turned into the joy of our assurance about what *John 10,9* simply and clearly expresses: *"I am the door, whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture...."* *"...whoever comes to me I will never drive away!" John 6,37* *"For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."* *1 Cor 13,12*

So the crown of the brilliant and excellent visit was a renewal of the certitude: to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords Whom Her Majesty also humbly adores and confesses and daily stands in front of, Whose Word she faithfully listens, too, we have simple and straight access any day and anywhere. As we come and as we are. Backpack worn shoes foreign commoner.... or as we are... And He will sooner or later surely receive us in His throne hall, where we shall see Him face to face and adore Him forever! *"They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."* *Rev 22,4* He promised it. And He is faithful!

"God save....!" – All glory to God!



To strengthen our spiritual immune system

Humanity has a new enemy! It's not an army this time. It's not a guerrilla or a terrorist group. The threats are not from nuclear weapons or long distance missiles. This time our enemy is invisible, a small virus that cannot be detected by our eyes. The virus covid-19 is shaking the whole world with fear and horror, sending a big part of the world's population into quarantine and breaking almost all financial wheels.

We all know that our immune system in our bodies is very important to fight virus and germs. Our immune system works to root out germs and other invaders that have no business in your body. The immune system is the cornerstone of prevention and recovery.

1. There are different ways for us to strengthen our immune system:

Behavior: To protect us we have to keep ourselves clean and refrain from dangerous environments.

External defense: The skin is usually the first line of defense against microbes.

Internal defense: Many cells and organs work together to protect the body. White blood cells play an important role in the immune system. Some types of white blood cells chew up invading organisms. Others help the body remember the invaders and destroy them.

But there is a virus more deadly dangerous than the corona virus. It affects our soul and spirit. The Bible calls it sin.

Fortunately God has given us a spiritual immune system to fight against that terrible virus.

We have to keep ourselves clean. Of course we have to refrain from environments, reading, films and internet links that are harmful for our spiritual life. This is our job.

"Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." James 4:8

"...and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." 1 John 1:7

2. Strengthen our spiritual immune system

Read the Bible, and the word of God will protect your heart.

"How can a young person stay on the path of purity? I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Ps 119:9-11

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Luc 2:19

Pray – and the prayer will give you spiritual resistance

"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil.4:7

Fellowship - The spiritual fellowship with sisters and brothers is a protection for us. We need their ministries, spiritual fruits and gifts as a protective shield over our lives.

Allan Ekstedt - country leader TLM Sweden



John the Baptist

I remember, years ago when I was a baby Christian, the pastor of the church saying that John was part of the last dispensation and that we are part of the new dispensation. It sounded impressive and gained me some brownie points in RE lessons but I'm not sure I understood what it meant. The word dispensation was not one I used very often but I guess the reality is that John the Baptist is, in a way, the bridge between the Old and New Testaments. He had all the fire and energy of an Old Testament prophet and yet the grace and humility that Jesus brought in.

Think of the way that he challenged injustice, impurity and called on everyone, even the Romans to repent. That and his clothing were very Old Testament like. Then remember that he allowed his disciples, even encouraged them to follow Jesus and not himself. Then there is that wonderful verse in John where he says, *"He must increase, and I must decrease". John 3,30*

For him it was all about Jesus and not himself. It reminds me of the chorus –

*"It's all about You, Jesus
And all this is for You
For Your glory and your fame
It's not about me
As if You should do things my way
You alone are God
And I surrender to your ways"*

I think that John would have sung this with enthusiasm. The trouble is that I sometimes forget that He is God and in charge. I do like to tell Him what to do and I am sure that there are areas where He is definitely the passenger and not the driver. I am not sure that I want a God who is stuck in the backseat. I want him up front and steering.

June Nash - June is now retired. She worked for TLM as missionary, trainer and director.



Being diligent and at peace with God in a time like this.

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' 2 Peter 3 : 10 -18.

At this end time and with the current pandemic situation we are in, the most important thing for us as believers is to make every effort to be at peace with God, allowing Him to guide us, we should be on our guard and not get carried away with fear, and concern about what we have no control over. Let's take advantage of this period of '**stay at home**' to:

Understand that the world we live in has an '**expiry date**', although we don't know that date, but all the things we see around us has a **red letter mark 'X'**; which means it is destined for destruction, the kind of mark we see on buildings that will be demolished to either make way for a new road or a new building construction; so let's not be shocked when the world is crying about global warming, pandemic and all sorts. God's promise in Hebrew 12:26-29 that He will shake not only the earth but also the heavens once more, indicate God removing the created things so that what cannot be shaken will remain, let's therefore put in our efforts to live a blameless and holy life and be at peace with God as we look forward to His return and the inheritance of a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

- Seek God developing intimacy with Him and thereby growing in the grace and knowledge of Him such that when this period is over a Christ-like character would have been formed in us and the world, our community, people affected by leprosy and our partners will see Christ in us. God's utmost desire is to have a consistent personal communion and intimacy with us; that is why Jesus told us in His sermon on the mount that when we want to pray 'go into your room, close your door and pray to your Father who is unseen then your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you openly' (Matthew 6:6 NIV); also the psalmist said 'he who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the almighty (Psalm 91:1). The importance of seeking intimacy with God is so that we can grow in the grace of our Lord that we all need to survive during and after the period of Covid-19. It also helps us to know God's plan and prepare ourselves to fit in to God's eternal programs at this end time. We will do this by prayerfully knowing what His plan is for us and how can we invest our lives and time to carrying it out and avoid distraction.

- Seek to invest in a good relationship and be at peace with our spouses and children; that means this time of 'stay at home' will include good fellowship with our spouses and children so as to discover them more and maximize the opportunity for fellowship. This is time to recalibrate our family life and bring heaven into our homes. For us to be effective in dwelling together in unity and peace within the larger community of believer and also the community of TLM global fellowship, we have to first develop the habit of living in harmony and peace with our spouses and our children or siblings; it is time to build tolerance, forgiveness, forbearing one another and building a peaceful and joyous family; we may need to play together, take a casual work together, exercise together and may be for some of us with children, help with their school work and don't forget to watch a movie together and feel each other's warmth!

If we by the grace of God diligently carry out these 3 things within this period, we will definitely grow in the grace and knowledge of God, we will build lasting and beautiful memories in the minds of our children and spouses and will also be able to serve our communities with joy in a Christ-like way when the lockdown is over.

May the Peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus and May the God of peace be with you at this period. Phil 3: 7 &9

Bunmi Oluloto - Servant of Christ in the Niger Republic. TLM Country Leader Niger and Chad



Psalm 35

Of David.

¹ Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me.

² Take up shield and armor; arise and come to my aid.

³ Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me.

Say to me,

“I am your salvation.”

⁴ May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame;
may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay.

⁵ May they be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them away;

⁶ may their path be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.

⁷ Since they hid their net for me without cause
and without cause dug a pit for me,

⁸ may ruin overtake them by surprise—
may the net they hid entangle them,
may they fall into the pit, to their ruin.

⁹ Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD
and delight in his salvation.

¹⁰ My whole being will exclaim,
“Who is like you, LORD?”

You rescue the poor from those too strong for them,
the poor and needy from those who rob them.”

¹¹ Ruthless witnesses come forward;
they question me on things I know nothing about.

¹² They repay me evil for good
and leave me like one bereaved.

¹³ Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth
and humbled myself with fasting.

When my prayers returned to me unanswered,

¹⁴ I went about mourning
as though for my friend or brother.
I bowed my head in grief
as though weeping for my mother.

¹⁵ But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee;
assailants gathered against me without my knowledge.
They slandered me without ceasing.

¹⁶ Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked;
they gnashed their teeth at me.

¹⁷ How long, Lord, will you look on?
Rescue me from their ravages,
my precious life from these lions.

¹⁸ I will give you thanks in the great assembly;
among the throngs I will praise you.

¹⁹ Do not let those gloat over me
who are my enemies without cause;
do not let those who hate me without reason
maliciously wink the eye.

²⁰ They do not speak peaceably,
but devise false accusations
against those who live quietly in the land.

²¹ They sneer at me and say, "Aha! Aha!
With our own eyes we have seen it."

²² LORD, you have seen this; do not be silent.
Do not be far from me, Lord.

²³ Awake, and rise to my defense!
Contend for me, my God and Lord.

²⁴ Vindicate me in your righteousness, LORD my God;
do not let them gloat over me.

²⁵ Do not let them think, "Aha, just what we wanted!"
or say, "We have swallowed him up."

²⁶ May all who gloat over my distress
be put to shame and confusion;
may all who exalt themselves over me
be clothed with shame and disgrace.

²⁷ May those who delight in my vindication
shout for joy and gladness;
may they always say, "The LORD be exalted,
who delights in the well-being of his servant."

²⁸ My tongue will proclaim your righteousness,
your praises all day long.



Psalm 36

For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD.

¹ I have a message from God in my heart
concerning the sinfulness of the wicked:
There is no fear of God
before their eyes.

² In their own eyes they flatter themselves
too much to detect or hate their sin.

³ The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful;
they fail to act wisely or do good.

⁴ Even on their beds they plot evil;
they commit themselves to a sinful course
and do not reject what is wrong.

⁵ Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.

⁶ Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,
your justice like the great deep.

You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.

⁷ How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.

⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

¹⁰ Continue your love to those who know you,
your righteousness to the upright in heart.

¹¹ May the foot of the proud not come against me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.

¹² See how the evildoers lie fallen—
thrown down, not able to rise!



Abraham's election

See the French original on the next page

"If I have found favor in your eyes ..." (Genesis 18.3)

Abraham recognizes that he was elected for the sole benefit of divine grace. Because of his grace, Abraham will follow God's directions not that he would deserve election but because he has been elected. When we read the end of chapter 11 of the book of Genesis and the beginning of chapter 12, we can observe that the one who leaves Ur to go to Canaan, is not Abraham but his father Terah (Genesis 11.31).

For reasons which are not indicated to us: illness, old age, discouragement ... Térach stopped halfway, in Charan, where he died. After the death of Terah, Abraham continued on his way to Canaan (Genesis 12 .1). What is the election based on, Terah and then Abraham? We are not told that Terah or Abraham were more deserving men than any other. Simply God addressed them because that was his choice. Election is an undeserved grace.

When Abraham gave a tithe of everything to Melchisedek, he did it spontaneously, there was no law to do so. When Abraham practices circumcision it is not to obtain any favor from God, but it is because God in His grace chose him so that he would become the father of a multitude (Genesis 17.4 - 11). It's the mark of a grace filled alliance. This grace will remain, even when Abraham sins by lying to Pharaoh and to Abimelech (Genesis 12.13 and Genesis 20.2). Likewise when he agreed to have a son with Hagar the handmaid of Sarah, he did not obtain divine favor because he was perfect and deserving, but because God gave him grace.

It should not be concluded from what has just been said that the grace of God is a safe conduct for living in sin. Far from it, grace empowers us to walk in a manner worthy of our heavenly vocation. Grace restored Abraham because Abraham recognized his sin. He confessed his fears and his lies, and the grace of God continued on his life.

Grace not only saves us, draws us to God, but it also enables us to be humble to find the right path. We are not elected because we have done such and such works, but we are elected because God loved us before we even thought of him.

My prayer on this day:

Thank you Lord for granting me your grace. This undeserved grace surprises me, it exceeds my understanding, but I simply receive it with faith. Amen!

Reverend Elie FOFOLO - Born on August 5, 1964, son of a Baptist Pastor, both parents died. I am a pastor of vocation and formation, in 2001 I had my degree in Theology at the Protestant University in Congo (U.P.C). After working as a Pastor in the local Church of Kingabwa 1 from 2004 to 2011, I had a meeting with Angelika Piefer who headed the Coordination of the Mission against Leprosy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, from where I had this passion for people affected by Leprosy and I invited Angelika to come to World Leprosy Day in our church on Sunday 29/01/2012, in Kingabwa. This work led us to discover two girls from the

same family with signs of leprosy, and their brother ended up being infected, but all three were treated and in good health. This sparked this passion to work as a volunteer in raising awareness, mobilization and the relationship with the local churches of the platform "Church of Christ in Congo" (E.C.C in acronym). - In July 2019, I obtained the Master in Psychotrauma, at the University of Kinshasa, at the Faculty of Medicine. Training that allows me to better listen to and accompany people who suffer trauma and stress for biopsychosocial care. - I am married to only one woman, Madame Espérance since 16/10/1988. From this union God gave us five children including two girls and three boys. Just like Abraham and Sarah, my wife and I, are willing to give up everything and go where the need for the Mission is felt. - Elie Fofolo is currently pastor at the local church of Masina 3, the 15th Congo Baptist Community in Kinshasa

L'élection d'Abraham

"Si j'ai trouvé grâce à tes yeux..." (Genèse 18.3)

Abraham reconnaît qu'il a été élu au seul bénéfice de la grâce divine. A cause de la grâce dont il a été l'objet, Abraham va suivre les directives de Dieu non pour mériter l'élection mais parce qu'il a été élu. Lorsque nous lisons la fin du chapitre 11 du livre de la Genèse et le début du chapitre 12, nous pouvons observer que celui qui quitte Ur pour aller en Canaan, ce n'est pas Abraham mais son père Térach (Genèse 11.31).

Pour des raisons qui ne nous sont pas indiquées : maladie, vieillesse, découragement... Térach s'est arrêté à mi-chemin, en Charan, où il est mort. Après la mort de Térach, Abraham va poursuivre sa route jusqu'en Canaan (Genèse 12 .1). Sur quoi repose l'élection, de Térach et ensuite d'Abraham ? Il ne nous est pas dit que Térach ou Abraham étaient des hommes méritants plus qu'aucun autre. Simplement Dieu s'est adressé à eux parce que tel fut son choix. L'élection est une grâce imméritée.

Lorsqu'Abraham donne la dîme à Melchisedek, il le fait spontanément, aucune loi ne l'y oblige. Lorsqu'Abraham pratique la circoncision ce n'est pas pour obtenir une faveur quelconque de la part de Dieu, mais c'est parce que Dieu lui a fait la grâce de le choisir pour qu'il soit le père d'une multitude (Genèse 17.4/11). C'est la marque d'une alliance de grâce. Cette grâce va demeurer, même lorsqu'Abraham va pécher en se rendant coupable de mensonge auprès de Pharaon et auprès d'Abimélec (Genèse 12.13 et Genèse 20.2). De même lorsqu'il va accepter d'avoir un fils avec Agar la servante de Sara, il n'a pas obtenu la faveur divine parce qu'il était parfait et méritant, mais parce que Dieu lui a fait grâce.

Il ne faudrait pas conclure de ce qui vient d'être dit que la grâce de Dieu est un sauf conduit pour vivre dans le péché. Loin de là, la grâce nous responsabilise à marcher d'une manière digne de notre vocation céleste. La grâce a restauré Abraham parce qu'Abraham a reconnu son péché. Il a avoué ses peurs et ses mensonges, et la grâce de Dieu est restée sur sa vie.

La grâce, non seulement nous sauve, nous attire vers Dieu, mais elle nous rend également capables d'être humbles pour retrouver le bon chemin. Nous ne sommes pas élus parce que nous avons fait telles et telles œuvres, mais nous sommes élus parce que Dieu nous a aimés avant même que nous pensions à lui.

Ma prière en ce jour :

Merci Seigneur de m'accorder ta grâce. Cette grâce imméritée m'étonne, elle dépasse ma compréhension, mais je la reçois simplement avec foi. Amen !

Révérend Elie FOFOLO - Né le 05 Aout 1964, fils d'un Pasteur Baptiste les deux parents sont tous morts. Je suis pasteur de

vocation et de formation, en 2001 j'ai eu ma licence en Théologie à l'Université Protestante au Congo (U.P.C). Après avoir travaillé comme Pasteur dans l'Eglise locale de Kingabwa 1 de 2004 à 2011, j'ai fait une rencontre avec Angelika Piefer qui dirigeait la Coordination de la Mission contre la Lèpre en République Démocratique du Congo, de là j'ai eu cette passion des personnes affectées par la Lèpre et j'ai invité Angelika de venir faire la Journée Mondiale Lèpre dans notre église le dimanche 29/01/2012, à Kingabwa. Ce travail nous a emmené à découvrir deux fillettes d'une même famille avec des signes de la lèpre et leur frère aussi a fini par être contaminé mais tous trois ont été soignés et sont en bonne santé. Cela suscita cette passion de travailler comme volontaire dans la sensibilisation, la mobilisation et la relation avec les églises locales de la plateforme "Eglise du Christ au Congo" (E.C.C en sigle). - En juillet 2019, j'ai obtenu le Master en Psychotrauma, à l'Université de Kinshasa, à la faculté de Médecine. Une formation qui me permet de mieux écouter et d'accompagner les personnes qui souffrent des traumatismes et des stress pour une prise en charge biopsychosociale. - Je suis marié à une seule femme, madame Espérance depuis le 16/10/1988. De cette union Dieu nous a donné cinq enfants dont deux filles et trois garçons. - Tout comme Abraham et Sarah, ma femme et moi, sommes disposés de tout abandonner et aller où le besoin de la Mission se fait sentir. - Elie Fofolo est actuellement Pasteur à l'Eglise locale de Masina 3, de la 15^{ème} Communauté Baptiste du Congo à Kinshasa





Little steps of faith - in the right direction

Morning devotion, TLM Fundraising Conference, Brentford, UK, March 2020

Ecclesiastes 11:4 - He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

Fear is often the reason we don't take the first step, we sometimes fear that we may make mistakes, that we may fail, and perhaps get embarrassed. And so we postpone making some important commitments. Fear makes us in indecisive sometimes. - But it's ok to feel fear, and I will like us to learn from some examples of bible heroes;

Moses when called to go tell pharaoh to let the children of Israel go, here is what he says: *"Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."* Exodus 4:10 (NIV)

Gideon when called to rescue Israel from the Midianites said: *"But Lord, how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!"* Judges 6:15 (NLT)

Father Abraham when told he would be the father of many nations what did he do: the Bible records that he bowed down to the ground, and he laughed to himself in disbelief. *"How could I become a father at the age of 100?" he thought. "And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?"* Genesis 17:17 (NLT).

But I am sure we are all familiar with the end of these stories; when we take little steps of faith in the right direction we see God demonstrate His power in miraculous ways.

And I am not any different in my response to God; most of the fundraising decisions I have made, I was afraid, but I made them anyway, many turned out to give very good return. *And even when we didn't receive a donation, at least we learnt how not to do it.*

What have you heard during the last two days? What new ideas are you nervous about testing? Like Moses, Gideon and Abraham you can make it, if you can just dare to take that first step of faith.

God has called us in The Leprosy Mission to do His good works which He had prepared for us long before now. He already knew we would be here right now, He knew we would experience turbulent waters of economic crises, of corona virus pandemics and of people not wanting to give. He knew all of these yet He calls us anyway. That tells me that He has already made provision. Paul confirms this in *Philippians 4:19 - when he said: "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."* We must note that Paul did not say that "in the absence of financial crises... my God will meet all your needs"

One of my favourite scripture which I often remind my daughters is *Philippians 4:13 - "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* (NKJV)

We can do all things through Christ who has called us in The Leprosy Mission

And please be reminded, there will never be a perfect time to do what God has placed in our hearts, but we can make now our perfect time. When the stock market crashes, it often comes with new opportunities to make more money in the near future for those who would invest in it. When there is dwindling resources, its time to make the investment in building new relationships that would lead to giving in the present, but also in the long term.

I will like us to just pray grace and courage over each other, take one minute each to just pray for the person you spoke to earlier and I will wrap up with a short prayer.

Prayer points

As we go away with new ideas, Lord we ask the help of the holy spirit to implement with courage and discernment.

Lord we ask your favour over each member as we cast our nets to raise more resources in spite of whatever the economic situation. We pray for safe travel as we return to our respective destinations after the conference. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.



Lockdown

(noun): a state of isolation or restricted access instituted as a security measure.

John 20:19-23

In the UK, we're all familiar with lockdown now after over three weeks of it. It seemed to happen very quickly, one day we were all going about our everyday lives, though maybe a bit apprehensive about the obvious spread of the Covid 19 virus in Europe. Then within a few days we found ourselves in a very different situation as the virus took hold in our country.

No doubt we all react differently to this new life, but for some, anxiety develops into fear, and the lockdown becomes a time of great stress. We still need to get food, and some need to go to work. But suddenly going outside, visiting shops or a place of work opens the possibility of exposure to a new enemy that we never expected.

If nothing else, the feelings associated with lockdown help us to get right into the minds of Jesus' disciples that first Easter. As from the Friday evening; after the judicial execution of Jesus and his rushed burial before the sun went down marking the start of the Sabbath, this group of 11 men and maybe a few others were in total lockdown. The Apostle John tells us:

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders..."

They were afraid to show their faces in public; they were afraid that they would be recognised, and in the oppressive atmosphere of Roman occupied Jerusalem, they were afraid that they too would be taken in by the Jewish authorities, and somehow plots made for their own executions. And of course execution in those days often meant crucifixion – the most horrific death anyone could imagine. No wonder they were afraid.

Yet into this dark oppressive atmosphere of fear comes Jesus in all his resurrection power. He brings a totally new perspective. He brings the living proof that the impossible has actually happened – he has risen. He speaks words of peace and reassurance. He shows them his crucifixion wounds (and later encourages Thomas to touch them). He tells them that their movement is not finished – it's only just begun! He breathes on them with the breath of the Holy Spirit – a breath to be confirmed a few weeks later at Pentecost. And he sends them out in the name of the Father. Wow!

As I reflect on this I recall the command "Do not be afraid" ringing through the pages of Scripture down through the centuries. God's word to Abram after one of his testing experiences; God's word through Moses to the Israelites as they stood trapped between the Egyptian chariots and the Red Sea; God's word to Joshua as he stood on the banks of the Jordan looking at across the river to the impenetrable walls of Jericho. Then I recall the words of Paul writing about the peace of God which passes all our human understanding.

Wow! What an assurance we have in times of trouble.

So I pray that God's peace will be with you all, and may he fill you with his presence as we all prepare for a new chapter when this lockdown is lifted.



'I'll never let you fall'

"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Deuteronomy 33:27

The story goes of a man who fell over a cliff and managed to grab hold of a bush half way down on the cliff face. Clinging on, with rocks and waves far below, he cries, "Help! Is there anybody out there?" He hears a gentle voice from the air around him, "Let go, my child, I will catch you." After a long pause the man cries, "Is there anybody else out there?"

Years ago I used to collect a five-year-old boy from school. Our route to his home involved a visit to the children's playground, where there was a climbing frame in the shape of a high archway of metal bars. He would start confidently from one end and attempt to get over the top to the other side. The middle was a challenge: the height, the drop, the need to turn around for descent! I would stand underneath and offer encouragement and advice (easy when I wasn't up there!), and from beneath him I would say, "I will never let you fall!"

Five-year-olds aren't too heavy, so I was confident of my promise! And occasionally he would wiggle through the bars and drop safely into my arms. Part of the challenge of his letting go and my catching him was to gain confidence that my promise was true: that I loved him enough and was strong enough *never* to let him fall. (I wouldn't try it now: he's 16!)

Life is full of challenges, hard knocks and dangers of falling. Sometimes it seems, from our limited world-based view, that God *does* let us fall: into exam failure, job-loss, bereavement, illness, tragedy, breakdown, leprosy diagnosis. How could God let that happen? I lie broken on the hard ground or in the mud; -where were the arms of God? Where was the love? What happened to the angels to "lift me up in their hands"? (Psalm 91:12) -And where was Lord who "will not let your foot slip"? (Psalm 121:3) It was the cry of Job in all his losses and sufferings, *"If only I knew where to find him;...I would state my case before him"* (Job 23:3-4). No doubt sometimes, like any good parent, our loving Father allows us to experience the consequences of our own mistakes... but that surely doesn't account for many of life's blows, the worst bruises in a fallen world.

It seems to me that as we make our way over life's 'climbing frame', with its fearsome challenges and potential hazards, the strong but gentle assurance of our Father is more trustworthy than we can see from our world-based perspective. Many of life's experiences can and will only be understood in a context of eternity. The assurance that underneath are everlasting arms is more true and trustworthy that we can see now. God's arms hold us in ways beyond the immediate hurts and questions, and ultimately they hold us beyond grave, beyond the experiences of this life, into an eternal context where the hurts and questions are no longer relevant.

"You will not abandon me to the grave..... you will fill me with joy in your presence." (Psalm 16:10-11). With the ultimate assurance of those everlasting arms, I hope I can have the faith to rest in the awareness and sense of them now.

With my good wishes and prayers, **David Beazley**. David began involvement with The Leprosy Mission in 1992 when he came as Minister to a Church near the International Office in Brentford. He acted as an informal 'chaplain' to the Office, and served on the International General Council for some years. At the same time he became a member of TLM England and Wales Board, serving as Chairman for six years and on various committees. He chaired the Spiritual Ministry MAWG, and is also able to serve TLM by leading retreat days and other such things as opportunity allows. He now pastors a Church in South-West England part time, and continues as a volunteer speaker for TLM.



The following text is copied & edited from a Facebook post from Martin Stimpson - who had adapted a poem, by an unknown author, in response to the current Coronavirus pandemic.

We are not in the same boat ...

I heard that we are all in the same boat, but it's not like that.

We are sailing in the same storm, facing the same crisis, but we are not in the same boat. Your ship could be shipwrecked and mine might not be. Or vice versa.

For some, quarantine is optimal. A moment of reflection, of re-connection, easy in flip flops, with a cocktail or coffee. For others, this is a desperate financial & family crisis.

For some that live alone they're facing endless loneliness. While for others it is peace, rest & time with their mother, father, sons & daughters.

Some are bringing in extra money with endless overtime, Others are working more hours for less money due to pay cuts or loss in sales. Others no longer have a job.

Some families will receive extra income from Government stimulus while other families will see £0 for the duration of it.

Some were concerned about getting a certain chocolate for Easter while others were concerned if there would be enough bread, milk and eggs for the weekend.

Some want to go back to work because they don't qualify for unemployment and are running out of money. Others want to kill those who break the quarantine and are seen outside.

Some are home spending 2-3 hours/day helping their child with online schooling while others are spending 2-3 hours/day to educate their children on top of a 10-12 hour workday. Other children have no formal educational opportunities.

Some have experienced the near death of the virus, some have already lost someone from it and some are not sure if their loved ones are going to make it. Others don't believe this is a big deal.

Some have faith and expect miracles during this time. Others say the worst is yet to come.

So, friends, we are not in the same boat. We are going through a time when our perceptions and needs are completely different.

Each of us will emerge, in our own way, from this storm. It is very important to see beyond what is seen at first glance. Not just looking, actually seeing.

We are all on different ships during this storm experiencing a very different journey so don't judge others by what's happening in your boat, we are all just doing our best to navigate our way through the storm.

A few additional thoughts: We may not be on the same boat, but we trust in our Saviour and Lord and our good Father, whose banner over us is ALWAYS love. His promises are the same for each of us, no matter what our personal circumstances or experience of this storm is. HE IS FAITHFUL. HE WILL NEVER LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US.

Let us pray for one another at this time.

Please read Hebrews 13:20-21 in closing.

Joanne Briggs - TLM Northern Ireland Country Leader



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.

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;
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.

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.



Psalm 38

A psalm of David. A petition.

- ¹ LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.
- ² Your arrows have pierced me,
and your hand has come down on me.
- ³ Because of your wrath there is no health in my body;
there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin.
- ⁴ My guilt has overwhelmed me
like a burden too heavy to bear.
- ⁵ My wounds fester and are loathsome
because of my sinful folly.
- ⁶ I am bowed down and brought very low;
all day long I go about mourning.
- ⁷ My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body.
- ⁸ I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart.
- ⁹ All my longings lie open before you, Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
- ¹⁰ My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my eyes.
- ¹¹ My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds;
my neighbors stay far away.
- ¹² Those who want to kill me set their traps,
those who would harm me talk of my ruin;
all day long they scheme and lie.
- ¹³ I am like the deaf, who cannot hear,
like the mute, who cannot speak;
- ¹⁴ I have become like one who does not hear,
whose mouth can offer no reply.
- ¹⁵ LORD, I wait for you;
you will answer, Lord my God.
- ¹⁶ For I said, "Do not let them gloat
or exalt themselves over me when my feet slip."

¹⁷ For I am about to fall,
and my pain is ever with me.

¹⁸ I confess my iniquity;
I am troubled by my sin.

¹⁹ Many have become my enemies without cause;
those who hate me without reason are numerous.

²⁰ Those who repay my good with evil
lodge accusations against me,
though I seek only to do what is good.

²¹ LORD, do not forsake me;
do not be far from me, my God.

²² Come quickly to help me,
my Lord and my Savior.



All you can eat!

“He (..) broke the loaves. Then He gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people.”

Mark 6:30-44, Mark 6:41

Jesus wanted rest for his disciples who had just returned, exhausted from their intensive campaign of preaching and teaching. But except for the relaxed time that they spent together in the boat as they calmly crossed the lake, this was not what happened. A large crowd was waiting for them on the shore. Jesus seized the opportunity to share his teachings with them. He touched their hearts and minds. He gave them a wholly different vision of God than they were used to, a wholly different understanding of the notion of Serving God.

The time passed and as it grew late, the disciples came to Jesus. They told him what was going on in the crowd: A food shortage threatened. Just like the disciples, we may speak with Jesus about the needs we see among the people around us. And usually, He will ask: “What assets and options do YOU have to do something about it? I agree, that seems awfully small. But together, let us start with this.” Just like the disciples, we may freely distribute what we have. When we have exhausted our reserves, whether materially or mentally, we go back to him to find renewal and affirmation; to receive from his hand the replenishment of our supplies. So that we can go out again fully trusting in his provision and distributing freely what we have received.

What this passage shows us is the essence of Jesus’ ministry – and of our role in it. Jesus managed to bring order in a crowd that could easily have trampled him. He gave them spiritual and physical food. He gave them himself, the living bread.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, make me willing to give the little that I have so that in your name, I may meet the needs of those around me.

Question

What assets, options and talents do YOU have?

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.



Apparition

“When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and they screamed”

Mark 6:45-56 , Mark 6:49

How could it be that the disciples totally misinterpreted the situation they were in? The best that could happen to them that night initially shattered their already overstrained nerves. It was as if the storm that raged around them now erupted inside them as well. Of course, it was pitch dark. Because of the waves they could not get a clear view of the shadowy human figure they thought they saw. They were working under great pressure. Just handling the boat required all of their attention.

The disciples had left everything behind to follow Jesus. They had lived through so many amazing experiences since then and seen so many miracles. In addition, they had been sent out themselves to share the teachings of Jesus, drive away evil powers and heal the sick. But the wonderful adventure on which they had embarked had also brought them in this present situation of crisis. A crisis so deep and total that they thought an evil spirit had come to overwhelm them.

By following Jesus we, too, may have beautiful experiences and do great things. But it is also true that these wonderful events can sometimes lead us into situations of great confusion as well. Sometimes storms unexpectedly erupt in which we no longer know what is up or what is down. At times, we are confronted by changes in our own life or in the life of our Christian community and we become disoriented and lose all sense of direction.

This story assures us that particularly in such situations, Jesus comes close. He reassures us and leads us through the storm to the place he has planned for us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for the privilege of following you. Help me to see where you are in situations in which I'm so anxious and fearful.

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Basic principles

“You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men”

Mark 7:1-13, Mark 7:8

In my country (the Netherlands) and in most western democracies, every new law must be validated against the constitution. Not one of our thousands of laws and regulations may contradict these basic principles that we have agreed on together. In this passage, Jesus does something like that. The ten commandments are the basic principles that God laid down personally and all the laws that Moses developed after that are expressions of these basic principles. At least a thousand years had passed between Moses and Jesus. During that time, experts of the law had provided further interpretation and had adjusted Moses' laws to 'modern' developments. Jesus gives a specific example where one such adjustment had led to injustices that clearly contradicted the ten commandments. And, He says, this is just one example out of many.

The example consisted of a trick that people used to escape their financial obligations toward their parents. In a situation where no social security existed, the support of parents could be a costly affair. Children could make a declaration that made parents lose their rights. It was an application of God's law designed purely to serve personal financial interests.

When we suffer injustice, it hurts. But when injustice is done to us in the name of God, we can't help thinking that a God who approves such treatment cannot be a God of love who wants the best for us. By bending the law of God to serve their own interests, people take away a clear view of the one God who is characterized by justice, mercy and faithfulness (Mt 23:23). Thus it is not hard to see why Jesus opposed this practice so strongly!

Prayer

Teach me good judgment and discernment, for I trust in your commands (Ps 119:66)

Question

Can you accept it, when doing the will of God goes against your personal interest?

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Faith and our Lifestyle

... all these things come from inside a person and make them 'unclean'.

Mark 7:14-23, Mark 7:23

It is important to eat well. The food that comes from outside your body affects your health as well as your psychological state. In Jesus' time, Jewish people viewed their diet as part of a lifestyle which rendered them ritually clean. Clean, so that God could accept you and grant you his grace. It was part of your relationship with Him.

Jesus puts himself in direct opposition to this idea. The problem of uncleanness, He says, is not your lifestyle, is not in what you eat. The problem is inside you. Becoming clean begins with the purification of your thoughts and doing away with sin in your life. You only have to try to find out that that is not something we can do ourselves. Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice to set us free from the evil that resides within us and that exercises its power inside ourselves.

By saying this, Jesus laid the foundation for the preaching of the gospel in other cultures. Later the young Christian church would declare that non-Jewish people who wanted to follow Jesus did NOT have to adopt a Jewish lifestyle (Acts 15). The transformation the gospel brings begins from within. The more our hearts are changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, the more we will be able to discern how our lifestyle has to be adjusted to reflect that change. It is the role of the local Christian community to prayerfully reflect together on the questions that arise as a result and to make choices that make sense within their own context.

Prayer

May our love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that we may be able to discern what is best and we may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ (Fil 1:9-10).

Song

It's Your blood that cleanses me,
It's Your blood that gives me life,
It's Your blood that took my place,
In redeeming sacrifice.
And it washes me whiter than the snow, than the snow,
My Jesus, God's precious sacrifice.

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.



Crossing the border

“The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia.”

Mark 7:24-30, Mark 7:26

Jesus had left his country. His disciples needed rest and He wanted to pray and reflect on his future strategy. The movement that had sprung up around him was meeting with resistance from the religious leaders and He knew that would only be getting worse. He retreated into silence.

His peace was rudely broken into by a woman who falls to the ground blocking his path and begs for his help. This is a mother pleading for her child. She puts all her trust in Jesus' ability to provide the help she needs. One crumb will be sufficient already.

The story of the Syrophoenician woman is the first in the gospel of Mark in which someone from outside the Jewish culture actively puts her trust in Jesus and thereby receives a full measure of God's blessing. It is true that in Mark 5 a non-Jewish man is set free from the dominion of evil spirits but he himself did not seem to actively participate in the process. This present incident widens the horizon both for Jesus and for his disciples. Here they find faith in someone from another culture! This is followed in Mark 8 by the second multiplication of the bread. There, after having distributed food to people from his own culture (Mark 6), Jesus then distributes food to thousands of non-Jewish people in the Dekapolis (7:31).

The prophecy of Isaiah regarding Jesus takes on new meaning here: 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth' (Isa 49:6).

Prayer

Father, help me to understand my brothers and sisters who come from another culture than my own and help me to learn from them.

Question

God loves all people and all nations. His kingdom spans the earth. People from another culture and another religious background can come to faith in Jesus. How can I contribute to bringing that about?

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.



Non-verbal communication

And taking him aside from the crowd privately, Jesus put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha!”

Mark 7:31-37, Mark 7:33-34

Jesus was still outside of his own country and He was confronted with the needs of the people there. He knew that God the father had revealed himself to the Jewish people with the aim that they would tell others about Him. At the same time, He knew that the Pharisees and teachers of the law were unable to accept his teaching. They were too locked into their legalistic interpretation of the Old Testament. They would not go out to share the message of liberation with other people in countries around them. They were deaf to his words and could only speak about them disparagingly, without understanding.

Jesus communicated with this speech- and hearing-limited man without words – with his fingers, his eyes, his mouth. When he emphatically said ‘*Ephphatha!*’ He had to open his mouth wide so that his intention was immediately clear. This man trusted Jesus and received healing. His ears were opened and his tongue released.

Jesus sighed. This verb ‘to sigh’ occurs only a few times in the New Testament. Every time it expresses a deeply felt desire for change, for renewal and liberation. Jesus so wanted those deaf teachers of the law to be able to hear his words and share them with others. But He knew that the only way that could happen was if He paid the price for it. Their hearing limitation could only be resolved if the power of sin were permanently broken. For that He had to go to the cross. We see Jesus retreating from his daily work of teaching and healing. In the next chapter He starts to talk to his disciples about his decision to go to Jerusalem and pay the price (8:31)

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open also our ears, that we may hear and understand; release also our tongues, so that we may speak plainly about you.

Question

Are we, Christians of the 21st century, willing to share the gospel with the nations around us?

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.



Psalm 39

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

¹I said, "I will watch my ways
and keep my tongue from sin;
I will put a muzzle on my mouth
while in the presence of the wicked."

²So I remained utterly silent,
not even saying anything good.

But my anguish increased;

³ my heart grew hot within me.
While I meditated, the fire burned;
then I spoke with my tongue:

⁴"Show me, LORD, my life's end
and the number of my days;
let me know how fleeting my life is.

⁵You have made my days a mere handbreadth;
the span of my years is as nothing before you.

Everyone is but a breath,
even those who seem secure.

⁶"Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom;
in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth
without knowing whose it will finally be.

⁷"But now, Lord, what do I look for?
My hope is in you.

⁸Save me from all my transgressions;
do not make me the scorn of fools.

⁹I was silent; I would not open my mouth,
for you are the one who has done this.

¹⁰Remove your scourge from me;
I am overcome by the blow of your hand.

¹¹When you rebuke and discipline anyone for their sin,
you consume their wealth like a moth—
surely everyone is but a breath.

¹² “Hear my prayer, LORD,

listen to my cry for help;

do not be deaf to my weeping.

I dwell with you as a foreigner,

a stranger, as all my ancestors were.

¹³ Look away from me, that I may enjoy life again

before I depart and am no more.”



The wisdom of butterflies

As Elizabeth opened our front door last week, it bumped against the wall and this slight jolt aroused a butterfly chrysalis hidden in the doorframe. We stood in awe as we watched the unfurling of a velveteen purple butterfly. As fluid surged into the unfolding lustrous wings, they fluttered gracefully whilst they dried. Then, with wings fully extended, it gave a few gentle beats and floated out into the garden.

Our garden is awash with butterflies today, mainly “Pioneer Caper White” butterflies, which form part of a huge north-easterly migration across southern Africa. [This tranquil and idyllic scene is somewhat tarnished by the Navy’s decision to use this quiet ‘lockdown’ day as an opportunity for machine gun practice...]The butterflies are sustained during their trek by the Shepherd’s tree, which grows in the arid regions of the interior. This migration has been a source of wonder to me since my childhood and each year my admiration for these gentle visitors to my garden increases. Weighing less than half a gram, they manage to fly into the teeth of the howling South-Easter. How do they survive the searing heat of the Karoo? I’ve mentioned previously the many migrations we witness in the Cape: the whales from the Antarctic, the Amur falcon from Siberia and seals – last year at this time I wrote about ‘Buffalo’, the seal who faithfully finds his way to our beach from Marion Island – yes, he’s back.

When Noah had completed building the Ark, we are told that *“Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark”*. Some Biblical commentators see echoes of this convergence on the Ark in modern migrations and hibernations. The fact that animals can cover such vast distances reminds us that they would have had no difficulty reaching the Ark when summoned by the Lord and that they would have readily and rapidly dispersed across the world once the earth had dried after the Deluge. [Arctic terns cover a total of 50 000 kilometres each year.] Despite much research in South Africa, there is still a great deal of mystery about the butterfly migrations. I rather hope that is the way it will stay. I like the idea that aspects of the interaction between Creator and creature must forever remain beyond our grasp, feeble as such understanding is, even at the best of times.

The prophet Jeremiah used the example of migrations when admonishing the people of God: *“Even the stork that flies across the sky knows the time of her migration, as do the turtledove, the swallow, and the crane. They all return at the proper time each year. But not my people! They do not know the LORD’s laws.”* [Jeremiah 8 vs 7; NLT]

His people had lost their way. These days we would say that they had lost their moral compass. I wonder if Jeremiah’s reference to the avian migration was a hint of the exile to come – that for seventy bitter years, His people would yearn to migrate back to their home, to fly out of captivity?

Most scientists agree that migrating creatures make use of some sort of internal compass. If so, it must be an astonishing instrument. If you’ve tried plotting your position on a chart, at sea and out of sight of land, using a sextant, chronometer and chart tables [no calculators to do the heavy lifting], you’ll know that this is an exceedingly difficult exercise, requiring many months of practice, attention to the most exacting standards of precision, and cross checking. Even with modern navigational aids, aircraft have been known to land at the wrong city, sometimes even in the wrong country and occasionally on the wrong continent! In most cases, it appears that pilots have ignored information from their systems and have then become confused. We can learn a lot from butterflies who trust their God-given instruments rather than what they

think they can see. We would say of pilots who make these errors that they are “only human”. Which is true, but you and I have not been called to live according to human principles or to regard such standards as acceptable for calibrating our moral compasses. For on a Day that is soon at hand, He will summon the nations again and to find our way to Him, we shall require a compass, calibrated according to the Cross.

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.



Do not be troubled by situations, believe in the omnipotence of Jesus Christ.

The French original : see below

John 14: 1: Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, and believe in me.

The Lord asks us by this passage to keep our courage and our assurance regardless of the unhappy events and situations that we go through in this world.

Precisely, he asks us not to panic when confronted by diseases, epidemics, wars, accidents... which are considered to be the stateless means that the devil uses to seduce many Christians.

Why does the Lord recommend us to keep calm in front of all these situations of the world? It is because he knows that the devil our accuser chooses these strategies to attack us, invade us and weaken our powerful weapon which is faith in God.

He creates these events in our lives and once we are disturbed, he takes the opportunity to suggest bad thoughts of suicide, poisoning, consultation of magic, fetishism in short, and the abandonment of the Christian faith...

We must not lose our faith, despite the situations we are going through, our God is in control of everything.

My testimony

I am Mr Raphael Mulamba, I am in charge of the development of projects within the Mission Against Leprosy in Congo, I am religiously married to Mrs Thérèse Kangodia.

In 2018, TLM DR - Congo delegated me to participate in the celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities in the province of Kongo - Central in the territory of Luozi.

Often, we take advantage of such moments with the presence of political and administrative authorities to talk about the problems of people affected by leprosy and living with disabilities, emphasizing the improvement of their living conditions, accessibility and participation in the community life.

Indeed, upon returning from this celebration, I was in a ferry, as always, to cross the Congo River and continue on the road to Kimpese and from there take my bus to Kinshasa.

When we started the crossing, almost in the middle of the river, a motor of the ferry stopped and the ferry started to drift towards the Atlantic Ocean, because at this point the ocean is not far.

The passengers started to get restless and confused, including myself and the people who were on both sides. Usually the ferry takes 15 to 20 minutes to reach the other shore, but that day we had been on the water for 2h30 and it was then that the ferry a whirlwind blew up in the water.

At that terrible moment beloved, I remembered this passage, do not be disturbed, so I began to pray and my attitude influenced other Christians among the passengers who also began to cry out to the Lord. So, by the power of God, the sailors managed to start the other engine and we reached the other shore to everyone's amazement. Beloved, do not lose your trust in God, keep your confidence in him, do not panic in at events, he will always stand up to assist us. Thank you.



L e Bac sur le fleuve Congo vers Luozi.



Le BAC à l'arrivée dans l'autre rive.

Mulamba Mbuyamba Raphael, agent dans la Mission Contre la Lèpre au Congo, changé du programme.

Ne soyez pas troublez devant les situations, croyez à la toute puissance de Jésus-Christ.

Jean 14 :1 : Que votre cœur ne se trouble point. Croyez en Dieu, et croyez en moi.

Le Seigneur nous demande par ce passage de garder notre courage et notre assurance devant les événements et situations malheureux que nous traversons dans ce monde.

Précisément, il nous demande de ne pas paniquer devant les maladies, les épidémies, les guerres, les accidents...qui sont considérés comme les apats, des moyens que le diable utilise pour séduire beaucoup des chrétiens.

Pourquoi le Seigneur nous recommande de garder le calme devant toutes ces situations du monde, c'est parce qu'il sait que le diable notre accusateur choisit ces stratégies pour nous attaquer, nous envahir et affaiblir notre arme puissante qui est la foi en Dieu.

Il crée ces événements dans nos vies et une fois que nous sommes troublés, il profite pour nous suggérer ces mauvaises pensées de suicide, D'empoisonnement, de la consultation de la magie, du fétichisme en bref, l'abandon de la foi chrétienne...

Nous ne devons pas perdre notre foi, malgré les situations que nous traversons, notre Dieu est au contrôle de tout.

Mon témoignage

Je suis Mr Raphael Mulamba, je suis chargé du Développement des projets au sein de la Mission Contre la Lèpre au Congo, je suis marié religieusement à madame Thérèse Kangodia.

En 2018, TLM DR –Congo m'a délégué participé à la célébration de la Journée Internationale des Personnes Handicapées dans la province du Kongo –Central précisément dans le territoire de Luozi.

Souvent, nous profitons des moments pareils avec la présence des autorités politico –Administratives pour parler des problèmes des personnes affectées par la lèpre et vivant avec handicap, insistant sur l'amélioration de leurs conditions de vie, sur l'accessibilité et la participation à la vie communautaire.

En effet, au retour de cette manifestation, je suis entrain dans un bac comme toujours pour traverser le fleuve Congo est continuer la route jusqu'à Kimpese et de là prendre mon bus pour Kinshasa.

Quand nous avons commencé la traversée, presque au milieu du fleuve, un moteur du bac s'est arrêté et le bac à commencer à couler vers l'océan atlantique, car à ce niveau l'océan n'est pas loin.

Les passagers ont commencé à s'agiter, à se troubler, y compris moi-même et les gens qui étaient dans les deux rives. Souvent le bac met 15 à 20 minutes pour atteindre l'autre rive, mais ce jour là nous avons fait 2h30 sur l'eau et il suffisait que le bac rencontre un tourbillon pour s'enfoncer dans l'eau.

A ce moment terrible bien aimés, je me suis souvenu de ce passage, ne vous troublez pas, ainsi j'ai commencé à prier et mon attitude a pu influencer d'autres chrétiens parmi les passagers qui se mirent aussi à crier à l'Eternel.

Ainsi, par la puissance de Dieu, les matelots sont parvenus à démarrer l'autre moteur et nous avons atteint l'autre rive problème à l'étonnement de tous. Bien aimés, ne perdons pas notre confiance en Dieu, gardons notre assurance en lui, ne paniquons pas devant des événements, il se levera toujours le dernier pour nous assister.

Merci.

Mulamba Mbuyamba Raphael, agent dans la Mission Contre la Lèpre au Congo, changé du programme.
TLM DR Congo.



Questions, Our questions, Question to whom, Questions from whom. Part 1

I - Introduction

Luke 21v 5-19 Questions about the end of time 5 When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, 6'As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.' 7 They asked him, 'Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?'

I am not surprised that Jesus was questioned, he had just announced that the glorious Temple which Herod had built would be destroyed, this happened in 70 AD. The temple was enormous. Approximately 37 acres, the guides tell you there is room for 20 football pitches. Today there are two large mosques, and other buildings. The walls may have been as much as 30 meters high all the way round with glorious entrance gates. You can still see the enormous blocks used in Herod's structure. No wonder they asked *when will this be?*

It is terrifying when the biggest structure you have ever seen or heard of is threatened with destruction. As I write we wonder what life will be like after the corona virus. Structures we have relied on, will they change? The way we do things may well be different. After only a few days of lock down it is interesting to see the how on Sunday the many ways people found to resource worship, encourage others and the different connections on line. By the time you read this we may have the answers to the questions that are running through our minds at the moment.

In the gospels Jesus is often questioned for example, *who is my neighbor?* Some are tricks to find out if Jesus and his disciples pay their taxes. In return Jesus also questions his disciples, individuals and us. Like *who do you say that I am?* Questioning is built into the Jewish culture. Recently a friend told me he had found 250 questions attributed to Jesus in the gospels; When listening to a text questions wake one up, help to hold ones attention. That might have been the intention of the gospel writers.

What about you and I : do we enjoy asking questions? Or are we afraid we might be rebuked, put down or made to look a fool, when the answer is something obvious.

In some work situations to question a decision could mean loosing a job. On the other hand when people ask us why did we do this or that we may feel threatened and when challenged or asked something we can't or don't want to answer we may feel anxious.

But there is nothing wrong in questioning and questioning God as in the psalms, Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? Psalm 2 v 1 and Jesus prayer in the garden of Gethsemane "My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as You will" *Matthew 26 v 3*

Let us pause and think of those in the world who may be feeling like that today.

Elisabeth Liz Hichens épouse Barnett, Occupational Therapist worked with TLM at the Philadelphia Leprosy Hospital, Salur, AP India and at RSK Sungai Kunda, Palembang Sumatra, Indonesia. 1979-88. Today, she is retired living in South West France; with her husband James, she is joint secretary of la Mission Lèpre, France.



Questions, Our questions, Question to whom, Questions from whom. Part 2

II - Wisdom Literature¹ - Ecclesiasticus² / 19 in the apocrypha

- 13 Question a friend; perhaps he did not do it; or if he did, so that he may not do it again.
 14 Question a neighbour; perhaps he did not say it; or if he said it, so that he may not repeat it.
 15 Question a friend, for often it is slander; so do not believe everything you hear.
 16 A person may make a slip without intending it. Who has not sinned with his tongue?
 17 Question your neighbour before you threaten him; and let the law of the Most High take its course.
 Other ancient authorities add and do not be angry.

The idea of questioning here is about not jumping to conclusions. These questions leave the situation open as to whether there was a personal guilt, allowing for a mistake or a case of slander. To try and found out what really is going on, and also how people are feeling.

To question is ingrained in the Jewish psychic and so it should be in ours. Are we afraid of questioning God as it could mean we have little faith, but why? Of course we question the things we see, hear, and experience; why now, why should he have suffered, and particularly at this time when people are confined and many alone; why don't I learn. In the Psalms we find the writers frequently asking Why?

If you have Jewish friends or relations, you will know, everything is questioned, it can be exhausting, but it is stimulating, and exciting. Life is never boring.

In other parts of the scriptures for example Matthew 18 v 15-17, or Proverbs 27.5 there is an idea of pointing out peoples mistakes rather than rejecting them out of hand, but here Sirach differs from those writers, leaving open the question of the person's guilt and allowing that there maybe a mistake or a case of slander.

The real question for us today is should we question things, is it good to question, should we encourage others to question, or should we expect them to accept everything we say. I think we should encourage questioning.

Questioning is engrained in our scriptures, early in Genesis there are questions mainly by God to mankind, once you read the stories of Abraham from Genesis 12 onwards questions crop up all over the place Pharaoh questioning Abraham about his behavior, Abraham asking God in a round about way if his nephew will be saved, and so it goes on reaching to the liturgy of the passover see III so encourage the questioner, the child, the patient, the teacher and listen to question what are you or they are doing.

¹in the Oxford commentary on the New Revised Standard bible Wisdom is defined as the fear of the Lord.

²from the introduction *For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language*, reminds me of google translator

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Questions, Our questions, Question to whom, Questions from whom. Part 3

III - Learning with Questions - The Passover and ...

And when your children ask you, "What do you mean by this observance?" and today the specific questions which a child asks at the passover. Why is it than on all other nights during the year we eat/drink But on this night we eat

To explain the feast of Passover questions have been asked down the ages and are still asked today. I have read that even today, even when someone is eating the passover meal alone he will ask him:herself these questions.

The child is brought up

- to question, so as to learn,
- to question, so as to understand,
- to question because having thought over something one needs to check that he/she had really understood

It is not only the child who questions remember Mary at the annunciation her question *How can this be?* Jesus questions his disciples, and one of the most well known parables is provoked by the question *who is my neighbour*, which is retold 2000 years later as each generations takes in that concept who really is their neighbour.

Is it natural to ask questions or does it go dramatically against the grain. Most traditional cultures see it as the task of a parent or teacher to instruct, guide or command. The task of the child is to obey. "Children should be seen, not heard," goes the English proverb. And Paul in his letter to the Colossians writes *Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord*. Socrates, having spent his life teaching people to ask questions, was condemned by the citizens of Athens for corrupting the young.

In Judaism the opposite is the case. The following is from a paper written by the former Chief rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks of Great Britain.

"It is a religious duty to teach our children to ask questions. That is how they grow.

"The child is taught to question. Here is a story about Isadore Rabi, winner of the Nobel Prize in physics, he was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied, "My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, 'What did you learn today?' But my mother used to ask: 'Izzy, did you ask a good question today?' That made the difference. Asking good questions made me a scientist."

Am I too afraid of the answer to question, too afraid to admit I'm not sure, too afraid to be taken outside my secure walls; we are all being stretched as the world sees this pandemic, afraid to ask as we don't know what is going to happen to us or those around us.

IV - Conclusions

We need to ask questions

- to aid us and to teach children to be curious

- to wonder
- to reflect
- to enquire.

To ask is to grow, and we should never stop growing, ask, ask, ask, and ask again.

Have we lost the desire for ourselves and therefor the desire to teach others to ask questions so they can grow in faith, instead of teaching them to learn by heart this and that like the catechisms eg “Who gave you, thou name?

answer my parents and God parents at my baptism“ or

“What is a sacrament ?“

an outward and visible sign off an inward and invisible action

In teaching its children to ask and to keep asking, Judaism honored what Maimonides called the “active intellect” and saw it as the gift of God. No faith has honored human intelligence more.

We must continue to question and encourage others to question so we may grow in faith.

Then if we are ever put to test in time of trouble, we will be able to reply as described in the gospel according to Luke chapter 21.

13This will give you an opportunity to testify. 14So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; 15for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

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Psalm 40

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

- ¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
- ² He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
- ³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the LORD
and put their trust in him.
- ⁴ Blessed is the one
who trusts in the LORD,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.
- ⁵ Many, LORD my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.
- ⁶ Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—
but my ears you have opened—
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.
- ⁷ Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—
it is written about me in the scroll.
- ⁸ I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart."
- ⁹ I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly;
I do not seal my lips, LORD,
as you know.
- ¹⁰ I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.
I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness
from the great assembly.
- ¹¹ Do not withhold your mercy from me, LORD;
may your love and faithfulness always protect me.
- ¹² For troubles without number surround me;
my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see.
They are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails within me.

¹³ Be pleased to save me, LORD;
come quickly, LORD, to help me.

¹⁴ May all who want to take my life
be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin
be turned back in disgrace.

¹⁵ May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!"
be appalled at their own shame.

¹⁶ But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
"The LORD is great!"

¹⁷ But as for me, I am poor and needy;
may the Lord think of me.

You are my help and my deliverer;
you are my God, do not delay.



The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

Acts 2 New International Version (NIV)

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. **7** Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?" **8** Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? **9** Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome **11** (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" **12** Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Peter Addresses the Crowd

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15** These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! **16** No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 "'In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

21 And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

22 "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. **23** This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **24** But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. **25** David said about him:

"I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.

²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest in hope,
²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
you will not let your holy one see decay.
²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

²⁹ "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

"The Lord said to my Lord:
"Sit at my right hand
³⁵ until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet."

³⁶ "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.



Holy Spirit stir inside of me to have a new passion for my God

I know much has been said & written about prayer, yet these are a few ramblings of my mind. Through the years that I've known my God my level of passion towards Him can often be measured by the time I spend in prayer & how I pray. Not always but sometimes. Times of need seem to intensify my prayer mode, times of blessing, lighter & less intense. Then there are times when life is sort-of settled, no needs, no requests this can be a danger zone for lack-lustre prayers. A loss of passion for praying. Paul is writing to the Ephesian church & has this to say: *Ephesians 3:14-21 NIVUK For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Could Paul be saying: "Stay hungry for God! Look & understand from deep down inside of you, who you are because of Jesus & what He wants us to do on behalf of heaven & His Bride, The Church." Pray for more passion for Our Heavenly Father & His mission to reach & save the lost!

Passion promotes prayer! This requires **discipline** in our prayer lives. How do we develop this?

Paul gives us a few clues.

1. Decide to start praying. Set aside a time & a place to pray. (...*I kneel before the Father...*)
2. Don't be repetitive in your praying, assign a subject, a topic for each day & pray into that. Don't be afraid to change if needs be. (...*out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...*)
3. Know that our God is able to direct & answer our discussion with Him. (... *who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...*)
4. Let love be your motivation for praying. Love towards Our Heavenly Father & others. (...*established in love - to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...*)
5. Prayer is influential, to bring glory to Jesus the Christ & to the generations that follow us. (... *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations...*) *Romans 15:5-6 NIVUK May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind towards each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Make prayer count, prayer is more important than you think.

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.

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The Bridge - TLM Daily Devotions

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