

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

July - September 2021



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PP 12578/03/2013 (032108)

Being the Light

For us Christians, light is the representation of everything that is good, edifying and enjoyable. Even as human beings, we generally dislike the blackness. I for one loathe groping in the dark.

Our mood and outlook of the situation is greatly influenced by illumination. Many studies have repeatedly shown, lighting impacts our energy levels. Dimly lit environments are not conducive for high productivity, they are more likely to put us to sleep. We heartily welcome a beautiful clear morning after 12 hours of darkness or even long periods of overcast skies.

On the first day of creation, God created light. Light existed even before the sun and other forms of illumination came into actuality. God Himself is the ultimate source of radiance. Countless scripture attests that divine presence goes hand-in-hand with His glorious luminous brilliance. It is no wonder that Jesus is the 'Light of the world.' And is through Him we shall never walk in darkness anymore but have the light of life.¹

We are called to be [God's] sons and daughters of light. But what does it actually mean by 'being the light?' Jesus' existence is one of light. That is the only way He lives. Because it is who He is. Full of brightness, not a shade of grey present ... an existence of grace and truth.² This is what is meant by God is love. No deceit, but the truth in boundless grace. Loving all He comes into contact regardless whether they deserve it or not.

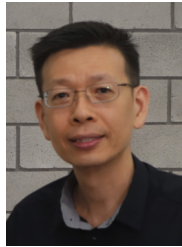
Jesus mingled with all strata of society; the rich, the poor and the unwanted. He touched what the society deemed as the untouchables (unclean). Jesus didn't hold back. He associated with them; regularly dined with them (until the Pharisees protested about His constant association!). They were part of His life. He brought them back from the margins, the outcast zone, back into the fold. Proclaiming and affirming that they are truly part of His own family.

Jesus gave us the disposition of his life; being one with the Father, He lives a life of 'loving humanity as His own self.' Let us just pause and reflect on this for a moment.

If we love someone as we love our own self, it implies that there would be no gap or distance between the two persons. The treatment is one of equality. There is nothing we wouldn't do for the other person. They would be part of us, an integral part, closer than our limbs.

That's the love, the love of Jesus. He leaves no one on the outside. His love is all-inclusive. None is left behind or abandoned on the fringes. Nobody is beyond the reach of His help.

That is being the light. Jesus even said that this would be the distinguishing characteristic: an identification of those who belongs to Him – 'because of the love for one another.'³



by
David Low

What about ourselves? How is our love? What is our perception of pre-believers? The immigrants? The uneducated? Those speaking a different tongue? The unproductive? Not pulling their own weight, seemingly always having their hand out.

Are we keeping such people at arms-length? Not far but not too close either. Do we just get involve when it suits us? What are our true feelings towards them? Are they just a task to do? Or do we feel their hurt, pain and sufferings and are moved with compassion like Jesus? Something to ponder about.

This issue ... being the light

As editor I would love to introduce and highlight all the wonderful articles written in this issue. Unfortunately, it is not possible. However on the subject of 'being the light,' I would urge you to read our Cover Story by Randall Dick where Jesus' light shone brightly in our fellow brethren in the face of the plague and persecution. Devaraj's piece on 'Mercy' is a central quality of who Jesus is and James Henderson's reflection on prejudice and exclusivity. Both are useful reads on this topic.

In rounding-up, I would like to welcome Anne Gillam and Eugene Guzon into our writers fold. Eugene is our Asia-Pacific Superintendent based in the Philippines. He takes the opportunity to write from time-to-time, while Anne is a retired pastor in the United States who is passionate for musings and poems. We are truly blessed to have them.

We pray that you will find this issue helpful in your walk in Christ.



¹ John 8:12
² John 1:14
³ John 13:35

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What our readers say:

Q1. Does it make me a lesser Christian if I do not pray in front of people, even among my own church members?

A. Some people do not feel comfortable praying in front of others, for various reasons. They could be shy, not used to doing it, fear others' judgement, lack confidence (maybe difficulty with words), or feel inadequate, unqualified, to pray publicly. It is a privilege if you are asked, maybe even be considered a duty or obligation. However, praying before others (or the performance of some religious or spiritual act) is not a measure of one's spirituality or character or acceptance before God. These are not methods to judge "greater" or "lesser" Christians, but simply our human response in worship, adoration and acknowledgement of our God. Over time, with practice and a change in your mindset and understanding, you will learn to pray confidently, joyfully and gratefully, before other people, and most importantly, before God.

Q2. In many sermons we are told not to doubt, but to have faith. I consider myself a Christian, but I still have questions and doubts over parts of the Bible and some beliefs of my church and fellow Christians. Is that a problem for my faith?

A. The faith we are to have is the trust and belief in the gospel - Jesus Christ as the Son of God came in human flesh to live a perfect life, died on the cross and was resurrected, on our behalf and in our place, so that humanity's sin is forgiven and we are reconciled to God to share eternal life by the Spirit. Of that we should have no doubt, because that "salvific faith" is the basis for our salvation and relationship with God. We do not doubt God's love, power and grace to achieve his purpose for mankind. We trust his continual working in our earthly lives.

However Christians can have questions and doubts on aspects of the Bible, God's revelation to us, and interpretation and understanding of the scriptures. As imperfect humans we will not have perfect understanding and knowledge, especially on spiritual things. Individuals, groups and churches will always have different views and opinions, doctrines and practices. These do not disqualify us as God's sanctified and beloved children. We can grow and continue to learn more as we study His Word, informally or via academic educational institutions. We can and should seek the counsel and knowledge of wise and qualified teachers and keep learning. It is a lifelong commitment to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). The Plain Truth is one small way to help believers in their spiritual growth and edification.

It is essential to make a distinction between putting faith in our "faith", which often is a manifestation of our feelings, experiences, opinions or even knowledge. We can sometimes make that mistake. Instead we must put our faith in God.

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The editor reserves the right to use your comments in whole or in part and may edit it for clarity and space.'



Ordinary People Who Changed the World

When we ask God to let his will be done in our lives, how much do we mean it? Though we seek to avoid putting our agenda before God's will, perhaps the bigger problem is that we often don't take God seriously enough in his statements about how he will use us to his glory and honour.

God desires to take our daily life and spend it in a way that yields results we could not produce or predict. The net result will be so much greater than anything we could "do for the Lord" - and the impact can be magnified even further when we allow God to work through us as a community of believers.

Here are two powerful examples that illustrate this point. In both cases, the people involved didn't perceive any particular dramatic value to what they were doing. Yet Christ used them to help bring the ancient Roman Empire face to face with Jesus Christ.

Women

When the first house church believers followed Christ's example in their communities, something started small, but soon grew large. The early church became attractive to women. The rate of conversion of women from paganism to Christianity became such a problem to the pagans that Emperor Julian issued a written order to Pope Damasus I banning Christian missionaries from calling at the homes of pagan women.

In order to appreciate how the daily walk of the individual Christian was used by Christ to create this history-shaping dynamic, we need to contrast the Christian community with that of the pagan.

Gendercide

New converts who undertook to follow Jesus would have stopped practicing abortion and infanticide. Because of the need for a large male population for war and food production, female infanticide was widely practiced in the time of the early church. It would have been a part of most family's circumstances.

A study of the Delphi inscription enabled historians to reconstruct about 600 families. Only six families had raised more than one daughter. We would call that gendercide today. Abortion was also widely practiced in Greco-Roman society. When Christians obeyed God, it

by
Randal Dick

became visibly evident to the pagan community around them - it made a difference.

This simple act of obedience made the Christian way of life much more attractive to Greco-Roman women, and in a fairly short time the Christian church's dominant population was women, while the pagan religion was primarily populated by men

Christ made them 'fishers of people'

These women journeyed with Christ; their lives began to take on the character of their Lord. They were transformed into something desirable, that men could not find anywhere else. It's not that there were no virtuous pagan women, it's just that proportionately there were so many virtuous Christian women that any man looking for a virtuous woman would tend to be drawn to the Christian community.

Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 7 were primarily intended to guide a phenomenon that was happening with increasing frequency. Pagan men were coming to the church to find wives.

Quality of life

Over time, Christian women also came to enjoy a significantly better quality of life than did many pagan women of Greco-Roman society. This is where the Christian community, all journeying together in response to Christ, made a huge difference:

1. The Christian community rejected the double standard that expected women to be chaste but allowed men extensive sexual license. This changed the pattern of life for the community and everyone whom they touched. It extended to the subsequent generations. This exponentially increased the impact of that simple obedience.

2. Christians also reflected God's love for widows. Pagan widows were often forced to remarry against their will. They often became the property of the new husband and lost all inheritance and personal control of their assets. They could be put away and left with nothing. Not so with Christians. The Christian community would help sustain Christian widows without means.

3. Christian women were able to marry at an older age. That may not seem important until one realizes that in



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the Greco-Roman world, girls were often forced into pre-pubertal marriage. Some historians estimate that nearly 50 percent of pagan females were married before the age of 14. Christian women had it much better because of the intentional walk of the community on a journey with Jesus.

4. Leadership roles were available to Christian women - they were ordained deacons right along with the men. Origen and others commented on the women who were deservedly part of the diaconate. (The term *deaconess* is a modern invention and does not reflect the original, where a deacon was a deacon, male or female.)

Plagues

Two serious plagues swept the Roman Empire. The first ravaged the region between A.D. 165 and 180, the second about 100 years later. During its 15-year duration, the first plague took the lives of between one fourth and one third of the population of the empire. It even claimed the life of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. (His death was portrayed at the beginning of the movie *The Gladiator*.)

Christians were affected by the plagues along with their pagan neighbours. But unlike the pagans, most Christians were following Jesus and were emulating him in the way they lived - and in some cases the way they died. Jesus used the fact that his people followed him to rock the empire.

Imagine yourself caught in the plague. The stench of death surrounds you. Caravans of carts work their way through the streets and out of the city carrying diseased bodies to a communal dumping ground where they are either buried or burned. People all around you are dropping dead. Who will be next? In the midst of circumstances like these, people ask searching questions about life, death and God.

Pagans had no one to turn to. Their priests did not have answers. Their gods were of no help. Pagan gods were to be appeased so they would not cause harm. But the pagan gods did not offer to have a loving relationship with the pagan people. Only Jesus did. The pagan gods offered no eternal life - except in the dismal underworld.

So there was a hope and peace in Christians that was nurtured by the Holy Spirit. There was an attitude of outgoing love even in the sore trial they faced. Around A.D. 260 Dionysius wrote:

"Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty; never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of

by
Randal Dick

their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and caring for others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead ... The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom."

Large numbers of pagans, including rulers, priests and physicians, having no hope or anchor for their souls, fled to get away from the plague. They left their sick behind, alone, without care or the basic necessities of life. The Christians, as a whole, tended to remain and care for their loved ones, and for each other. In many cases the love of God in them stretched far enough to also enter the houses of the pagans and care for their sick as well.

This act, resulting from asking themselves what Jesus would do in the same situation, had a profound impact. Here are some of the ways they made such a difference: The Christian example was in such stark contrast to the pagan example that large numbers of those who survived the plague were drawn to look at the Christians around them with open hearts. Their own belief system had let them down, but their Christian neighbours seemed to know a better way. Many were brought to Christ.

Pure religion ... undefiled

Epidemiologists estimate that basic health care, such as providing adequate water and warmth, can result in as much as a 30 percent higher survival rate. Hence there were many more Christian survivors than pagan survivors. This by itself was enough to change the ratio of pagans to Christians. Also, pagans who were cared for by Christians also enjoyed a higher survival rate. These survivors then would tend to have loving relationships with Christians in place of the suspicions of the past. Conversion rates soared.

This change of the status quo had such a dramatic impact that we find the Emperor Julian writing to his chief priest of Galatia, complaining that they needed to equal the virtues of Christians.

In a letter to another priest Julian wrote, *"I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the priests, the impious Galileans observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence."* And he also wrote, *"The impious Galileans support not only their own poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us."*

Poor Julian, like many today, could only see things in marketing terms. He had no idea that he and his system were being confronted by Jesus himself through the collective lives of those who heeded the call to *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."*¹ Ω





Motherhood and Regret

If you're looking for advice on raising/rearing/bringing up children - you're probably not since most mothers are bombarded with unsought advice - but if you are, you've come to the wrong person. I'm no expert. My husband and I have parented a now-grown son, and for three years we fostered two daughters, who are also grown. I thank God that the three have survived and thrived.

If you're a single mother working many hours and worried about the lack of time you spend with your children, I could say to you (if I were giving out advice) *just do your best*. If you are a stay-at-home mom, homeschooling your children, spending all day, every day with them, I could also say, *just do your best*.

The thing is, most of us are doing our best when we're in the middle of it. By the time the dust of our child-rearing years has settled and we look in the rear-view mirror, our children are grown. When we come out the other side and look back, we see all the things we could have, should have, done differently. I know, this is not very encouraging. Sorry. In all likelihood, and no matter how good a parent you try to be and think you are, you will have regrets. I do. I don't know any mother past her mothering years who doesn't!

It is encouraging to remind myself that I did the best I could at the time. We come into parenthood with generations of dysfunction piled up at our feet. Sometimes I think I am the only normal person on the planet, but then I figure that I'm just delusional and since everyone else is dysfunctional, I must be too.

At the time, **YOU** did your best! And if your best wasn't/isn't good enough - and our best isn't good enough because we are human after all - God forgives you. The only human who could have done parenting perfectly was Jesus. And he didn't have children. But Jesus, God the Son, knows what it's like to be a parent through his intimate relationship with God the Father. God the Father, has been and is the perfect parent and



by
Sondra Peters

look how his children turned out!

But what if you *didn't* do your best? God still forgives you.

It's time for all of you mothers to forgive yourselves because God does.

Who doesn't want you to forgive yourself? Who wants you to keep beating yourself up over the past? Satan, your adversary. Did you know that the name Satan in Hebrew is *Accuser*? Don't listen to Satan's accusations that you weren't or aren't good enough!

A brief note about forgiving yourself or forgiving others: God is the source. Do you catch yourself asking God to *help* you forgive, as though you'll do the majority of the work and you only need God's assistance? Do you go to a surgeon and ask him to *help* you remove your appendix when it's ruptured or do you hand your life over to the doctor? Hand your life over to God and ask Him to fill you with His forgiveness.

Here's something else to consider: no matter how much you think you messed up your children, you haven't done irreparable damage to them. You can never mess up your children so badly that God says, *They're too far gone or They're beyond fixing*. That would be giving yourself a whole lot of credit, and God not enough! Ephesians 1:4 [NIV] reminds us that your children belonged to God before they belonged to you.

"For he [God the Father] chose us in him [Jesus] before the creation of the world ..."

He longs to work with and restore your children to the relationship He always intended to have with them. He's not going to hold your imperfect parenting against your children! If you messed up and didn't set an example of passionately loving God, God will introduce himself to your children and will make up for the lost time! He's willing to do whatever it takes to have a relationship with

1 Heb. 12:1
2 1 Cor. 1:27

Continues on page 11

... joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer

As a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, many Christians consider it as a sign of something serious to happen soon and to be ready for it. Some said that it shows Christ second coming is imminent and we must be prepared.¹ Others feel that God is warning us of our human mortality and we need to be ready to die anytime.² Then there are still others who believe that the lockdown due to the corona virus is an opportunity to preach God's word to our neighbours and we should be ready so that the chance should not be wasted.³

Whatever our beliefs are about the impact from the deadly disease, being ready for something is not enough. We have to maintain the state of readiness when what we prepare for has not happened. Sometimes the state of readiness can last for years and even decades. Can the momentum be sustained?

The parable of the five foolish virgins who ran out of oil is a good example of having a good start but a poor finish. To stay alert for a long time is not easy. Tiredness sets in, distractions abound and impatience increases. Burnout may occur as the waiting drags on. Frustrations with the delay replaces the initial joyful anticipation. In the end, being ready but not being able to continue with the state of readiness is no different from being not ready in the first place.

So how do we ensure that we are always ready, for whatever reasons we may want to be ready for? There is a verse in the bible that gives us the solution "... Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

Joyful in hope

For followers of Jesus, hope together with faith and love are the three pillars of Christian living.⁴ Without hope, there is no point in being ready.⁵ As being prepared for something is future based, all believers must not only have hope in the future, but it must also be a joyful hope.

Living a godly life in the 21st century is not easy. Life is full of distractions, temptations are everywhere and yes, persecution of Christians still exists. Christians must not dwell too much on their current conditions where life is full of trials and difficulties but always looking to the better future as promised in the bible.

When the present going gets tough, remember

by
Wong Teck
Kong

the following 'hopeful' passages that can sustain our readiness:

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Yes, we do have hope. Let us cling to that hope whatever the circumstances.



Patient in affliction

To be ready also means to be ready to face trials, difficulties, persecution and even martyrdom. It is not just waiting but enduring and accepting trying situations. "Be ready" is an action verb, not a passive one. It includes taking steps to be ready, including unpleasant ones.

"All punishments are blessings. Tribulation is medicine to the soul." There is a lot of truth in those two statements, even for unjust punishment. It may be hard to accept but the scriptures do indicate that a lot of good is produced from our difficulties if we are 'patient in affliction'.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2).

Even after a life long walk with Christ, we may still not understand the full implication of the above verses. What we do know is that

to be prepared for something in the future, we will face trials and we need to undergo the afflictions with patience.

Faithful in prayer

Faithful in prayer has also been translated as constant in prayer which is better. It does not mean constantly praying (which is impossible) but constantly aware of the presence of God and our identity as his children.

- 1 Matthew 24:44
- 2 Ecclesiastes 9:12
- 3 1 Peter 3:15
- 4 1 Corinthians 13:13
- 5 Proverbs 13:12a

Continues on page 9

Joe's Speak and Ponder: Galatians 5:24

Galatians 5:24 [NASB]

"Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

The obvious question we have to face is how do we crucify the flesh? What do we need to do? God does not love us because of our performance, the word of God says he just loves us – if that were so how do we crucify the flesh?

Romans 6:11 [NASB] helps us answer this question. *"So you too, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."* The primary way we crucify the flesh is by ignoring it. We focus on the new you and not the old you.

Whatever you focus on, you expand, glorify and give life to. The Bible never tells us to focus on the old life. Just the opposite. It says God is making all things new. I give you permission, consider yourself to be dead. Just be alive to me. If you're alive to me, the very fact that you're alive to me means that the old man is dead because you're ignoring it, it doesn't play any part. We don't have to try and kill it every day. It's not what we're doing. We crucify it by ignoring it and by focusing on what God is really doing, which is building up the new you, he's not fixing the old you. He's only dealing with the true you in Jesus. And that's what Christ in you is all about, that's

by
Joseph
Zachariah

what He's holding open for you. This is who you are.

Galatians 5:20-23 (NASB) *"... idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law,"* gives us the contrast. We focus on the fruit of the Spirit and the Holy Spirit will provide the grace and empowerment to do just that.

Another reason to be at ease is that God is telling us we are doing this together – I am making you in my image, I am manifesting my life in you. You will be thinking like me, you will be imagining like me, you will be feeling like me and you will have my desires. Your awareness is totally going to change. We are going to speak the same language and we are going to enjoy this together.

God is relentlessly joyful in bringing you to a place of being a new creation in Jesus! May the "word" become flesh in your life. Ω



It is said that "an army moves on its stomach but a church moves on its knees." Without frequent and heartfelt prayers, a church will not move anywhere. To be ready and to maintain the state of readiness requires strength from outside of ourselves. That resource can only be tapped through prayer.

But just praying is not enough. The praying must be done regularly, habitually and often. Some of the principles of praying are we must never give up on praying,⁶ to pray for each other,⁷ to be thankful in our prayers⁸ and many others. The important thing is that without prayers, we can never be prepared for any eventuality.

6 Luke 18:1
7 Ephesians 6:18
8 Colossians 4:2

Conclusion

All of us are right now preparing for something in the future. It may be preparing to find the right partner, preparing for marriage, for starting a family, for a change in career, for retirement or even for death. However with all the steps taken, we may still be unprepared when the event actually happened (for example, early retirement forced on us by our employers)!

There is however one event in which we must all be ready. With a joyful hope, patient endurance and constant prayers, we must be ready any time to meet Christ. Ω



Speaking of Life: Notice the Details

Any good literature class teaches you to look at details. Your professor will draw your attention to rhyme and meter, as well as word choice and atmosphere.

We're often not used to treating the scriptures as literature. Even though the Bible tells us about history, the authors did so with thematic and artistic elements that are easy to overlook.

Take for example the way Matthew and Luke introduce Jesus' most famous sermon. No doubt Jesus reused material in his itinerant preaching over three years, sometimes even giving the same sermon twice. Look at the subtle difference between two gospel writers' choice of accounts.

In Matthew 5:1 [NRSV] we read:

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him."

Then in Luke we read:

"And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people."¹

Both go on to tell about Jesus giving a sermon very alike in substance. These details seem small, almost insignificant, until you look at the themes of these gospels.

Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience to prove that Jesus is the prophesied new Moses who will bring the good news of God to his people. As Moses went up the mountain to receive and deliver commandments, so Jesus gives the *Sermon on the Mount* in Matthew.

by
Greg Williams

Luke often wrote about money and how we are to treat the poor and needy. He wrote about Jesus coming to call all people to himself equally, emphasizing that we are all equal royalty in his kingdom. So he records the Sermon on the Plain.

The sermon on the mount and the sermon on the plain - the same sermon given twice, but the difference of venue is important. The underlying message is the same: Jesus is changing everything. The old laws and old traditions are being transformed. The old divisions of haves and have-nots in society are meaningless in the kingdom.

Jesus gives the new law from the mountain, and gives the new social order from the plain. I wonder where he would give this sermon in our society? Maybe on the steps of the White House with all the secret service guys running to stop him? Maybe in the middle of nowhere to people who make up the odds and ends of society?

His message was a surprise to many:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."²

These are the words of revolution, and at the same time these are words which appeal to every human heart. These words of forgiveness and hope are the virtues and values of the kingdom of God itself. Where would Jesus speak this good news to us? Would we listen? Ω

¹ Luke 6:17 NRSV
² Matthew 5:3-5

His Grand Design

The birds are singing
The worlds at peace
It gives my soul a pure release
To know I'm in
The Father's hands
And He unfolds
This glorious band
In His love
Designed it so
I would prosper
I would grow
And follow in
His grand design
To be a gardener
And tend his vine
To help His children
To grow inside
And in His love
To so reside
And sing of His
Tender care
Just like the birds
Up in the air

#AnneGillamPoems

by
Anne Gillam



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your children, just as He's willing to restore *your* parents' children as well ... that means you! God may not do this as quickly as you would like. Let me remind you that God's desire is for all to be saved and He is very patient (2 Peter 3:9).

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Just in case I haven't convinced you to bury those regrets and to forgive yourself, check out this quote by Dutch theologian Henri Nouwen. When you read this, remember, you are the person you need to forgive.

"Forgiveness means that I continually am willing to forgive the other person for not being God — for not fulfilling all my needs. I, too, must ask forgiveness for not being able to fulfill other people's needs. ... The interesting thing is that when you can forgive people for not being God, then you can celebrate that they are a reflection of God."

God is God, and you're not. God knew you would mess things up. The Triune God built that factor into His plan. Jesus has already taken on and dealt with your mistakes and the mistakes of your children (1 John 2:1-2). As Paul says in Phil 3:13, we can't waste our energies dwelling on

by
Sondra Peters

and focusing on the past. Instead, look to the future.

The future gives us so much hope. But what is your personal hope for the future?

We've been assured that the future includes a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13). We've been assured that we'll be completely transformed from mortal to immortal (1 Cor. 15:42-52). We've been assured that there will be no sorrow (Rev. 21:4). There will be no sin (2 Peter 3:13). We know that all beings in this new heaven and new earth will love God and will love one another (Hebrews 8:10-12). We will all be in the family of God. And unlike families today, there will only be love for one another - no hate, no resentment, no misunderstandings.

What's the one assurance we don't have? That's the assurance that your loved ones will be a part of this family of God. Perhaps that's tied into your regrets, that you didn't make sure your children knew and accepted Jesus as their savior. Again, you don't have that much power. Know this, God's desire is for ALL to be saved. Granted, the Bible indicates that not all will be saved, because not all will choose a life with God. God gives us a choice, after-all. However, if I were a betting person, my money is on God. Ω



Women Who Spoke the Word of God (Part 1)

(This is a two-part article. The first part covers women speaking God's Word in the Old Testament, followed by the second that concludes with the New Testament.)

Women have an increasing role in the work of the church. Women not only lead women in "women's ministries," but also lead men and women in music, prayer, teaching and speaking. Some people wonder why women should be allowed to do anything in church; others wonder why women can't do everything in church.

To give biblical perspective on this issue, let's look at evidence that God has used women to speak to his people. Women have spoken the word of God, and they have done so with divine approval and divine authority.

Hagar

The Lord gave Hagar a promise similar to the promise given to Abraham. ¹ Hagar then *"gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me'"* (verse 13).

What Hagar said is now in the word of God. She told us one of the names that tell us who God is. He is the God who sees us, and Hagar is the person who spoke that truth.

Miriam

After God brought the Israelites through the Red Sea, Miriam sang praises that are now part of the word of God: *"Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.'"* ² In public worship,

by
Michael
Morrison

Miriam sang what is now the word of God.

Miriam was a prophetess, which means that she spoke the word of the Lord. A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God to the people; a prophetess had the same role. Miriam had a role of spiritual leadership.

Deborah

The next prophetess in the Bible is Deborah. *"Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided."* ³

Deborah was a prophetess and a judge, and in both roles she spoke the word of God. Her role was not just a one-time event, but an ongoing responsibility. The people came to her for leadership on a regular basis—and there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that anyone thought it was unusual for a woman to perform this role. She was simply the most qualified person, and people accepted that.

God can raise up stones to do his work, and if he needed a man to do his work, he could raise up a man. But in this case he chose to work through a woman, showing that there is no theological reason that God can't use a woman to speak on his behalf, or to have a woman lead his people.

There were many men in Israel at that time, but God wasn't searching for one to be the judge, and apparently the Israelites weren't, either. They were quite willing to go to Deborah to have their disputes decided. She had wisdom, and her wisdom was more important than her gender.

¹ Genesis 16:7-10
² Exodus 15:20-21
³ Judges 4:4-5

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Deborah was a prophetess, someone speaking the words of God. *"She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, 'The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: "Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'"*"⁴

Here the Bible describes a woman speaking the words of God, giving commands to a man who was apparently enough of a leader that he could raise an army of ten thousand men. God is quite willing for a woman to give his commands to men. There is nothing in the nature of God or the nature of men and women that makes such a thing inappropriate. God can use women, and we need to be alert for the possibility that he is, and we need to be willing to respond.

Deborah went with Barak, and in verse 14 she again gives the word of the Lord to Barak: *"Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?"* So they went, and they won. It was a great victory, and Deborah and Barak commemorated their victory with a song of praise that is now part of the word of God.

*"On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: 'When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves - praise the Lord! Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I will sing to the Lord, I will sing; I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel.'"*⁵

Who is this "I" who is singing? In verse 7 we see that it is Deborah: *"Village life in Israel ceased,"* the song says, *"ceased until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel."* Deborah is the primary author of this part of Scripture. Like Miriam, she was singing praise to God in public worship. She is expressing spiritual leadership, speaking the word of God. This is a legitimate thing for women to do.

When the best person for the job is a woman, then God is quite willing to use a woman to do the work that needs to be done. Even in a patriarchal society, God can use women to speak his words.

A similar thing happened with Hannah, the mother of Samuel. *"Hannah prayed and said: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.'"*⁶

Again, a woman's words are now inspired Scripture. She spoke the word of God with words of worship that have inspired synagogues and churches for thousands of years, and that is a notable achievement for anyone. God inspired her to sing a song of praise.

Most of God's spokesmen were men. In this patriarchal society, all the priests were men, the kings were men, the military leaders were men. But even in that male-dominated society, God could use women to do his work.

Huldah

In 2 Kings 22, we catch another glimpse of what God was doing with women. In the 18th year of Josiah's reign, workers found a scroll of the law in the temple. Josiah told the high priest what he should do: *"Go and*

inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found" (verse 13).

The high priest wanted to ask the Lord about the scroll, so he *"went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah"* (verse 14). They could have looked for Jeremiah, but there was no reason to. Huldah spoke the word of the Lord just as much as Jeremiah did. A prophet speaks the words of God, and a prophetess speaks the words of God, and God inspires one just as much as the other.

So they asked Huldah, and in verses 15-16 we read her reply: *"She said to them, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, 'This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read.'"*

Huldah was commenting on the meaning of the Scriptures and predicting the future, giving an authoritative message from God. Again, there is no indication that anything unusual was happening. No one said it was strange to go to a woman instead of a man. Huldah was known as a prophetess, which means that she was known to speak the word of the Lord. She was doing the same thing she had on many other occasions: She spoke on behalf of God to the people. That is what prophetesses did.

(To be continued in the next issue)



- 4 Judges 4:6-7
- 5 Judges 5:1-3
- 6 1 Samuel 2:1-2



"Come Out of the World"

Christian leaders encourage us to "come out of the world." What does that mean? Go to the moon? Become hermits? Live in isolated communities?

When we understand that the word "world" as used in Scripture has different meanings, the matter becomes clear. First, there's the physical planet we live on.

God's perfect created "world"

God spoke into existence the earth and everything in it - a complex variety of creatures, plants, and humans. He made the oceans, the dry land and mountains, all perfectly designed for man, enabling us to live abundant lives, grow crops, build houses and other necessities, and to enjoy the beauty of nature. We should agree with God's own comment, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good..."¹ And how good it is - worthy of our praise, gratitude, and admiration. The psalmist extolled God's created world. "The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth, you founded the world and all that is in it."²

"How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all, the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number - living things both large and small."³

God commanded man to take care of the earth.⁴ But as we know, we have contaminated air, water, and land, and even worse, ignored and perverted God's instructions on how we should live.

Man's corrupt "world"

"World" is also used in Scripture to refer to the ungodly human traits such as pride, strife, greed, and competition - often referred to as "worldliness."



by
Paul Hailey

Scripture warns, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world."⁵

We need to heed God's warnings about drifting into worldly lifestyles!

"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God"⁶

"... Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues..."⁷ The word "her" in this verse refers to Babylon - a Biblical symbol of man's efforts to exalt self rather than yielding to God's instruction.

How should we live in today's corrupt world?

God calls us to withdraw from the prideful and sinful ways of the world. "It (God's grace) teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ..."⁸

Living righteously brings blessings into our lives, and as Christians our Lord gives us the incredible opportunity to be his earthly representatives until he returns. Yes, he tells us to represent him and his kingdom here and now. As Paul says, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."⁹ That is a high calling and privilege!

- 1 Genesis 1:31
- 2 Psalm 89:11
- 3 Psalm 104:24, 25
- 4 Genesis 2:15
- 5 1 John 2:15, 16
- 6 James 4:4
- 7 Revelation 18:4
- 8 Titus 2:12, 13
- 9 2 Corinthians 5:20

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Eagles in Flight

Isaiah 40:30-31 (ESV)

*30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
31 but they who wait for the LORD shall
renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.*

by
Eugene Guzon

we wait upon. We hope in the God who is good, who is for us, and who is able. As we wait on him, we bind ourselves to the divine source of inexhaustible strength, which renews us as we keep going.

In this verse, the prophet Isaiah was providing comfort to the people of Israel, who were longing for consolation and freedom. It was a long and difficult wait.

Our present-day journey is also full of delays and detours – some are minor inconveniences while others are difficult, life-altering challenges. What do we do when we find ourselves feeling lost, helpless, or unsure of what lies ahead?

The exhortation to us is the same. Wait on the Lord. Seek him, cling to the everlasting God who never grows weary and allow him to renew you. Waiting time is not wasted time. May this assurance liberate us as we wait and help us withstand the hardest circumstances, overcome the deepest disappointments, and soar above the fiercest storms. When we wait on the Lord, we are like eagles in flight.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord for being our comfort and our hope in the midst of life's delays. By your grace may we trade our fears for your faithfulness; our tiredness and inadequacy for your sufficiency. As we receive your peace, may we also pass this on to others in their waiting time. In Jesus' name, amen. Ω



Devotional:

The Philippine eagle is an endangered species and one of the largest in the world. The one I saw was being cared for in captivity, but I can only imagine what it must be like in its natural habitat, flying freely, strong and able to rise above the storms. The image of a soaring eagle is used in this popular verse in Isaiah 40, to describe how God renews those who wait on Him.

People do not normally want to wait. Waiting usually feels like one is being tied down, hindered or delayed. In verse 31, the term wait comes from the Hebrew word *qavah* which means to bind together as by twisting. Imagine plaiting together strands of cord to produce a rope. This brings an interesting perspective to our waiting. We are being told that as we wait, we are to entwine ourselves with God. We abide in Him, even as He abides in us. Waiting is not a passive act, but one wherein we come together with the Lord.

It is also important to remember that it is the Lord whom

As Jesus' representatives, we should live as he lived - living and sharing the gospel through good works and

telling others the priceless news of salvation. We can do so regardless of where we live, our education, or status in life.

We are to *"let our light shine before men, that they may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven."*¹⁰ Even if they seem insignificant to us, people do notice acts of politeness, encouragement, and godly character.

Living righteously does not mean forsaking any of the God-given pleasures of life. In fact, when we dedicate ourselves into our Lord's service, our lives become more abundant and joyful.¹¹

Another world is coming

Jesus graciously allows us to represent his kingdom here and now. But his kingdom is not yet here in fullness. Some day he will return and establish his everlasting kingdom in its entirety. *"He (Jesus) must remain in heaven*

*until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."*¹²

Jesus will make everything new.¹³ The earth will be cleansed and purified. The corrupt aspects of human nature will be removed. His followers will be resurrected to be like Jesus - radiant, ever living, and sinless.¹⁴

As God's children we will then participate with Jesus in renewing and restoring the earth.¹⁵ What an incredible future to look forward to!

Until then, let's remember we are here to represent Jesus to the world. Shortly before he died, Jesus prayed to the Father for all believers. *"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."*¹⁶

Heavenly Father, please show us and guide us to be effective ambassadors. Ω

- 10 Matthew 5:16
- 11 Matthew 6:33
- 12 Acts 3:21
- 13 Revelation 21:5
- 14 1 John 3:2
- 15 Revelation 21:4
- 16 John 17:15-18

The Value of Mercy

In the early years of my previous career as a teacher, I witnessed an incident that had a long lasting impact on my mind. Those were the days when I was a fresh teacher from college and, back then, the work culture was to honour the school Principal as one who was in complete authority and had to be obeyed. It was a time when school staff would carry out every instruction of the Principal without question. Part of the reason was the power the Principal wielded over staff as he was the one who signed our pay cheques. On one occasion, a temporary teacher who was paid on a month to month basis came to the Principal's office to collect his cheque. This young man needed the cheque badly as he was in urgent need of money for his family. The Principal bluntly told him that the cheque wasn't ready and asked him to come back in two days' time. I knew that wasn't true as I had already received my pay cheque. Seeing the temporary teacher in a state of distress, I walked into the Principal's office and asked him why he hadn't given the teacher his cheque. The reply I received was so shocking that I remember the incident clearly to this day. He said, "I want him to know who is boss and how he has to honour me." What arrogance! Could he not see the urgent need the young man had, especially as he was only a temporary staff?

My heart was distressed to see the young man leaving in tears. The Principal could have made the young teacher's day by being merciful; instead he chose to show his power and authority. Over the years, I have witnessed many incidents of people in power act in the most unkind and arrogant manner. I have seen how power can corrupt mercy. I have seen authority being used to belittle, insult, dominate, coerce and even force employees or staff members to cooperate in decisions made. It's true that employees or staff may need correction or guidance but all power wielded must go hand in hand with mercy. Imagine if God exercised His power and authority to punish us for every mistake we make. Psalm 103:10 tells us, *"He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities."* That is because the God we worship is a merciful God who wants to revive us, not revile us. Our human nature is to judge and exercise authority without considering the other person's situation. In the Gospel of John, there is an incident where a crowd of angry men wanted Jesus to make a decision on what they considered a major offence.



by
Devaraj Ramoo

The religious authorities of the day dragged a woman to Jesus and claimed that she had been caught in the very act of adultery. They demanded that the woman be stoned to death according to the Law of Moses. Everyone in the crowd became a judge at that point, forgetting that they themselves were guilty of various sins. Let's now place ourselves in the crowd and watch what Jesus does. Does He join the crowd and condemn her? Here is the very creator Himself, the Word who became a man. ¹ Knowing what was in their hearts, He tells the crowd, *"He who is without sin among you, can cast the first stone."* ² The crowd now walks away. Jesus chooses mercy despite the fact that the woman may really be guilty of adultery. When the crowd disperses He talks to the woman. In John 8:10-11 the account states, when Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no

one but the woman, He said to her, *"Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"* She said, *"No one, Lord."* And Jesus said to her, *"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."* How many times have we been like the woman caught in adultery? How many times has the Lord forgiven us and shown mercy instead of punishing us like we deserve?

Jesus was in no way excusing a serious crime like murder or fraud. He was dealing with a moral failing or human weakness and more importantly the desire to judge others. He was introducing the element of mercy that was not emphasized in the Law. He wanted His followers to practice mercy. The Epistle of James states that mercy triumphs over judgement. ³ One of the things we are all guilty of is being merciless to those who sin differently than we do. Just recollect the last time you spoke ill of someone. We know our sins but we think that the sins of other people are much worse than ours. Some people may even dislike us for being merciful! Even Jesus was judged by some for being merciful. Once Jesus was eating with tax collectors

and those termed as sinners. Immediately judgement was passed on Him by the self-righteous Pharisees. Their expectation of Jesus was that as a teacher of God's word, He should not taint Himself with those who were unworthy of their spiritual superiority. However, Jesus had a surprising answer for the self-righteous.

- 1 John 1:14
- 2 John 8:6-7
- 3 James 2: 12-13

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In the Gospel of Matthew, we read the answer Jesus gave to those who condemned Him for associating Himself with people considered as unworthy. He said to them, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*⁴ That is how God deals with us individually. Despite the fact that we may be in the wrong countless times, He chooses to be merciful and reasons with us to bring us to the right path. Therefore, if we are to be like Christ, we need to put on mercy as part of our character. Once we put on mercy, we automatically incorporate a forgiving heart into ourselves. Mercy, therefore, has two sides to it.

Firstly, mercy brings into us a nature to forgive others, especially those who have wronged us even though we may have the power to punish or take stern action against them. This is a quality that is rare in this world but demonstrated by Jesus throughout His ministry. The ultimate expression of this is when Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of mankind through His sacrifice on the cross, thereby, releasing us from death to taste the resurrection to eternal life. Mercy was extended to all mankind when the Word Himself became a man and lived as one of us that He may become the sacrificial lamb that releases us from the penalty that we deserve. What mercy we have received! It's not religion that releases us from death, it is mercy, the mercy of God. God forgives us through

Jesus Christ.

Secondly, mercy restores us to achieve our best because of compassion shown to us. We receive a second chance. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches a valuable lesson through the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus tells the story of a traveller who is attacked by bandits and left badly injured on the road. A priest comes along the way but passes by on the other side. Another individual comes along, looks at him and passes by, unwilling to help. Then a Samaritan comes along and when he sees the injured man he is filled with compassion. He gets down from his horse, bandages the wounds of the injured man, puts him on his own horse and brings him to an inn to take care of him. When he leaves he pays the innkeeper to watch over the injured man until he recovers.⁵ Jews and Samaritans were traditional enemies, yet this Samaritan showed mercy when he could have easily walked away. That is how God deals with us. We deserve death, yet we receive mercy from God to the extent that we are restored in a relationship with Him.

Every act of mercy restores someone and in turn also becomes a blessing to us. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."* A time will come where a situation arises when we ourselves require mercy. God has already shown us mercy countless times. He expects us to be merciful towards others. Mercy is the only blessing that you can give as an individual that is actually returned to you when you need it. Make mercy a part of your character. God knows many need it. Ω

⁴ Matthew 9:11-13
⁵ Luke 10:29-37

The Door of No Return

Jesus took on the guilt of our evil, and not once did he say, "I didn't do it." Protesting my innocence about racism is not the point. Feeling sorrow for the suffering that people who looked like me caused and can still cause is the point.

by
James
Henderson

Some years ago I visited a few of the infamous slave castles along the coast of Western Africa. These are where captives were "stored" prior to being shipped to the New World (the Americas and the Caribbean) and to other places. I went to see one of the most famous of the castles in Ghana.

It was a brilliantly sunny day, and everything seemed right with the world. As my friend, Gabriel, and I entered the gates, children were playing in a carefree way and street vendors tried to sell us richly coloured cloths and African souvenirs - it was just like walking into one of the typical Ghanaian markets. I was not prepared for what lay ahead.

The sun was so bright, making everything look clear and the white stone whiter, masking the horrors of the past. We went down to the windowless slave quarters where human beings were locked away in appalling squalor while up above them the governor and his guests were wined and dined.

We saw the lightless holes where offenders were kept prior to execution, we promenaded along the ramparts with the cannons facing seaward and we visited the women's quarters where mothers and daughters had huddled together in abject misery and in fear of rape, death and disease.

Then we walked silently to the "Door of No Return" - once slaves passed through this dark heavy door, they boarded the ships, never to return to Africa. Some say that even today the sharks follow the same trails of the slave ships as if instinctively waiting for their human prey to be cast overboard.

Slavery was not new to Africa. The Arab slave trade had been in place for centuries before then, and the Africans themselves had also been guilty of selling rival tribal members into bondage. But in sheer numbers, this was much worse. *"Between 10 million and 12 million enslaved Africans"* crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas from the 16th to the 19th century.¹

The ghosts in my mind cried out as I imagined the

screams of the women being raped callously by the guards, of the old people being beaten to death because they had outlived their commercial worth, of the helpless children snatched violently from their parents, and of the young men getting their spirit broken by the whippings, the torture, and by the hopelessness of it all.

In my mind's eye I could see the slaves crushed together in the gloomy chambers without natural light and sanitation, frightened, sobbing, praying to gods that did not deliver. I could see them walking slowly to the

Door of No Return, some being dragged and kicked there, and then the door closes and they are gone forever from their roots.

"I'm sorry", I thought - in a way, because of man's inhumanity to man, I did this. The reality is that I am still capable of doing it. I believe all of us, no matter what our ethnic or gender background, are capable of enslaving and mistreating others. We can all be tyrants: in the home, at work, wherever.

Do you suppress your partner, your children, those who don't look like you, those who don't think like you? Left to our own devices, each of us is capable of being cruel and of victimizing others.

As I turned back into the main courtyard, I saw a woman, who turned out to be an African American. She was sobbing uncontrollably. She looked at me and I felt accused. Doubly accused, because I am white and male.

Suddenly I became defensive. I wanted to tell her I didn't do this. I didn't put my fellow men into servile chains and sexually exploit their women. I didn't

do it. I was not even born. The woman stared at me, no words, and I tried to look away, but couldn't. Maybe this was her grief of a people lost, and I was intruding. "I DIDN'T DO IT!" I screamed in my head.

I'm a Christian, and I thought of Jesus. The theory is that Jesus took on the guilt of our evil, and not once did he say, "I didn't do it". Protesting my innocence was not the point. Feeling sorrow for the suffering caused by people who looked like me is the point. People who look like me can still cause such suffering. I didn't do it, but I could have, and there but for the grace of God go all of us, no matter what race or tribe we are.



¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transatlantic-slave-trade>

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Why Should We Tell People About Jesus?

Reflections on Romans 10:1-15

In Romans 10:1 Paul says that it was his heart's desire to see his fellow Israelites saved. But there was a problem: the Israelites that he knew were relying on the law to be right with God (Romans 10:2-4). Christ is the end of all that, Paul says. You cannot be right with God by improving yourself. The only way to be right with God is if God makes you right with him.

We have all lived under laws at times. When I was a boy I lived under my mother's laws. One of her rules was that you didn't track mud and dirt all over her clean kitchen floor when you came in from playing in the yard. You had to get the dirt off before you came in the house, even if it meant being hosed down on the back porch.

God cleans us up

God is no different. He doesn't want the filth of our sins tracked all over his house. The problem is, we have no way of cleaning ourselves up. It's

a catch-22 situation: we cannot come in until we are clean, but we have no way of getting clean. Only those who are holy, sinless and pure of heart can see God, yet no one can achieve that purity on his or her own.

That's why God had to come out of his house, in the person of Jesus, and clean us up. Only he could make us clean. If you are waiting to come into God's house until you get the dirt off, you will be waiting until judgment day. But if you believe what he says, that he has already made you clean, you can come in right now and sit down to dinner at his table.

Understanding the remainder of Romans 10 hinges on understanding this fact. It is impossible to know God until your sin has been removed. Knowing God does not make it possible to have your sin removed; having your sin removed is what makes it possible to know God.

To back up this point in Romans 10:5-8, Paul quotes from the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 30: *"Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down)." As human beings we cannot seek out and find God; he comes to us.*

by
Jonathan Stepp

God has found us

Moses had been to the mountaintop, seen God, received his word, and brought it down to Israel. They did not need to go find God and see what he says - God had already found them.

It is the same with Jesus, Paul is telling us. The eternal Word of God has come down to us, being made flesh

as the man Jesus. We could not go up to heaven and find him, or summon him to our aid. But he could, and did, choose in his divine freedom to come down to us. Jesus saved the creation by cleaning up the dirt of sin and thus opened the way for us to come into God's house.

That leaves us with the question: will we believe what God says? Will we believe that he has come down to us, found us, and already made us clean so that we may enter his presence? Will we believe that Jesus has already washed the

dirt off us so that we can now come into his house? To fail to believe this is to remain outside God's house.

This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 10:9-13. This is reality: God has redeemed his creation through Jesus Christ. This is reality: he washed away our sins and made us clean by his own work and righteousness, without any input, help or even request from us. When we believe in Jesus, confessing that he is Lord, we are now living in reality.

Here is an example. On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This executive order said that all slaves in all states in insurrection against the U.S. government were now free.

The news of this freedom did not reach the slaves of Galveston, Texas, until June 19, 1865. For two and half years those slaves had been legally free, but they did not know it and could not live in the reality of it until soldiers of the U.S. Army arrived to tell them.

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Jesus saves us

It is important for us to realize that it is not our confession that saves us. Jesus saves us. Remember what Paul has already told us earlier in Romans 10: we cannot obligate God to do anything. Our good works do not make us right with God, and it does not matter what kind of work we are talking about. Whether it is the work of obeying a rule - like keeping a day sacred or avoiding alcohol - or whether it is the work of saying, "I believe." As Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, even our faith is a gift from God!

Maybe it is helpful to think of the difference between a contract and a confession. A contract is a legal agreement in which an exchange takes place. Each party is obligated to trade something to the other. If we have a contract with God, then our confession of Jesus obligates him to save us. But we cannot obligate God to act on our behalf; that would be like ascending to heaven to bring Christ down. Grace is Christ choosing, in his divine freedom, to come down to us.

In a confession, however, a person stands in open court and admits to the reality that already exists. A criminal might say: "I admit it. I stole the merchandise." He has confessed to the true state of his world. Likewise, followers of Jesus say: "I admit it. I needed to be saved and Jesus saved me." They have confessed to the true state of the world.

Confess that we are free

What the slaves in Texas in 1865 needed was not a contract to buy their freedom. They needed to know and confess that they were already free. Their freedom had already been established. President Lincoln could set them free, and he did set them free by his executive

by
Jonathan Stepp

order. God had the right to save us, and he did save us by the life of his Son.

What the slaves in Texas needed was to hear that their freedom had been established, to believe that it was so, and to begin to live accordingly. This world being what it is, their freedom was only the first step in a long road toward being treated as free. Slaves need someone to come and tell them they have been set free. This is Paul's point in Romans 10:14.

Can you imagine what it was like for those slaves, chopping cotton in the 100-degree heat of Texas on that June day to hear the good news of their freedom? When they looked up and saw the U.S. Army coming, don't you think that was the most beautiful sight they had ever seen?

I think Paul would say that it was. In Romans 10:15 he quotes from Isaiah: "*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*" What does that tell you about our role in God's plan of salvation? We are his army, carrying the good news of what he has accomplished to all those who have not yet heard. We cannot save a single person. Our job is to be the heralds, the messengers, the newscasters of the good news of what Jesus has already accomplished.

Why should we tell people about Jesus? Because they are living as slaves when they should be free. Jesus won their freedom 2,000 years ago, and they still haven't believed the good news.

The Israelites that Paul knew were relying on the law to be right with God (Romans 10:2-4). Christ is the end of all that, Paul writes. You cannot be right with God by improving yourself. The only way to be right with God is if God makes you right with him. Ω

Rebecca's Snippets: God can Use us in Spite of Ourselves

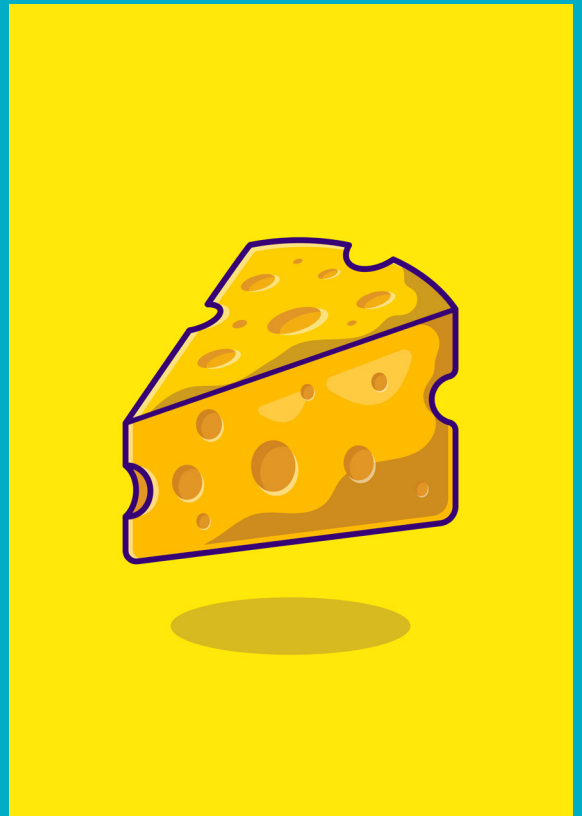
Galatians 5:24 [NASB]

Have you ever noticed just how many things have to be broken into bits, or have holes, before they can be used? Big pieces of bread must be broken into chunks before it can be made into scrumptious stuffing or crunchy croutons. Swiss cheese wouldn't be as good without the holes. Donuts wouldn't be donuts without their hole in the middle.

It goes for non-edible things too. Rocks must be crushed to become gravel for projects. Without holes in just the right places you would not be able to get any music or any sound from instruments.

Sometimes our lives feel as if we are full of holes, or all broken into fragments! But it is just those holed, fragmented lives that God uses for so many marvelous purposes. God is in the redemption business as the Bible proclaims from beginning to end. He uses all sorts of people, with all sorts of lives, and through these imperfect lives, he gives to others the bread of life. Through the holes and broken pieces in our lives He miraculously, often in spite of ourselves, makes beautiful music sound forth in our lives and the lives of those He uses us to touch. Ω

by
Rebecca Reise



Continued from page 18

Probably all of us would like to think that we humans have learned lessons from slavery, in the same way that we could have learned from other atrocities such as genocide. Sadly, history indicates that we don't learn the lessons. Genocide is still with us; slavery - and racism - have not gone away. Why not? Is it that we do not really change? Behind slavery is the evil of racism, and what really needs to be toppled and laid to rest is racism in all its guises and forms. Racism is just one variant of "my group"ism, which stems from me-ism, which afflicts us all.

Do we still feel an instant prejudice within when we see someone of another race or skin tone, or who dresses in a different way? We react negatively and keep them at a distance. Without spiritual transformation, men and women may progress technologically and scientifically, but human nature does not change without the indwelling presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Because of Jesus, a change in our - yours and mine - human nature is possible now. It's possible by turning to

by
James
Henderson

God's Son, Jesus Christ, and asking him to save us from ourselves, asking him to open your heart to see others as he sees them.

No matter your ethnic background, be honest about your racism and other prejudices, and ask him to change how you think so that you think in a loving and inclusive way just like Jesus did. That would make a difference in this uncaring world - to have another Christ-like person walk in it.

It may seem a small start, but that's how miracles begin. It's time to close the door on racism, and don't let it come back. Let's close that Door of No Return. Ω



Pruned to Bear More Fruit

by
Tesa Mandias

As believers, the Bible tells us, we will be pruned, things in our lives that stand in the way to receive more of His truth and light need to be removed. This is so that we can bear more fruit of the Spirit, bringing glory to our Father. It has to do with character building, our identity and security; who we are in Him needs to be built up (an ongoing process). It is not about what we do, rather about who we become. And from that place, the Holy Spirit will lead us to greater exploits.

John 15:1-8 explain, *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."*

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

As we grow in our identity in Christ, knowing we are His beloved; eternally saved, receiving His gift of no condemnation, and believing He is always faithful and kind towards us, with a desire to become more and more like Jesus, we are on secure ground, and the Holy Spirit can cultivate us to become more fruitful. We need to receive His love and attributes first to become more loving ourselves. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."*¹

The accent is now not on working for our Father, but on becoming more like our Saviour and following Him

wholly out of Love for Him who died, was resurrected and did everything for us and is still willing for us to become more dependent on Him, and to trust Him at His Word, for He is always willing and able to perform His promises and goodness towards us. *"And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."*²

Having received His love, we are able to reach out to others from a place of love and goodness too. We cannot achieve this on our own, we need His revelation and impartations to reach this transformation at heart level, to grow ever more beyond ourselves. Not by focusing on self and our own state of being, but on a loving Saviour whom we can ask and receive things; pertaining to all things in our lives: deliverance, provision, restoration etc. This is a process of Him doing the work in us, as we are unable to change ourselves or those we love.

We might think of pruning as an unpleasant experience but it does not have to be so. We can co-labour with Jesus in this process of removing obstacles that block His Life in us. We could invite Him, like David, *"a man after God's own heart"*, to inspect our hearts and to remove any wayward or wicked way in us.

*"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*³

When we give Him free reign to show us things that need to be removed; the distractions, the clutter, the lies, wounds and sins; our Lord will get that for us, He knows where we are at, He understands our level of maturity, and He is willing and able to change us, to help us come up higher and to receive solutions from Him, to be renewed in our will, mind and emotions. Our Lord understands that the total sum of who we are now, in our flaws and weaknesses, are consequences of what we

¹ Galatians 5:22-23

² Luke 3:9

³ Psalm 139:23-24

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He will provide the way and the means, such as you could never have imagined. Leave it all to Him, let go of yourself, lose yourself on the Cross, and you will find yourself entirely.

St. Catherine of Siena

Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that, unless we love the truth, we cannot know it.

Blaise Pascal

If you are going to walk with Jesus Christ, you are going to be opposed ... In our days, to be a true Christian is really to become a scandal.

George Whitefield

We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for our enemies.

Justin Martyr

"Truth without love is brutality. Love without truth is hypocrisy."

H. B. Charles

To love means loving the unlovable. To forgive means pardoning the unpardonable. Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless.

Gilbert K. Chesterton

Continued from page 22

have been going through in this fallen, imperfect world. He sees our struggles and pains, and Jesus want to set us free. He is not done with us, He is still working in and through us. *"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."*⁴

When we face challenges and trials, we are in a good place to hang onto Him, to come and ask Him, in all transparency, to bring us to surrender and have faith in Him. Observing from the level we are at, in despair, pain, lacking in lustre; we can see Him for who He really is, our God and strength, a very current help in times of need. In times of plenty we can see how easily distracted, overconfident or prideful we could become ... We could ask Him to keep us humble knowing that all good things come from the Father of lights and without Him we could not do any good thing of eternal value.

The key is to bring everything to His Lordship, to ask Him to open the ways for us to grow in identity, to trust that what we ask for He will surely deliver. We do not know how He will do this. But we can rest assured that our Creator and our Saviour who has deposited His Holy Spirit in us will answer in a way that will be His best and practical way for us. When we look at the cross we can become assured of this. *"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"*⁵

The Holy Spirit was sent to complete the work in us; spirit, soul and body. In Luke 18:27, it is written, *"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."* When He is at work in and for us, we are invited to rest in Him. To let Him be the Saviour to the utmost in our lives. When we do this we get to ride on the waves of His mercy and grace. In Hebrews 4:11, the Word says: *"Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."*

We can rest in Him and work with Him at the same

by
Tesa Mandias

time. It is in the receiving that we become, it is in the becoming that we can perform. Discern His gentle whispers through the noise of the world and the voice of self, and find it will always be Christ in us who is the hope of glory. For it is He Himself who is aiding the receiving, the becoming and the performing in and through us.

Would you come and receive, and keep on receiving? Our Lord is always willing and waiting for you to take more of Him. Ω



⁴ 1 John 3:2-3

⁵ Romans 8:32

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