

THE Plain Truth

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A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

January - March 2021

Trials: Where Are You, Lord? P.07

Being Thankful In Tough Times P.11

A Lamp to My Feet P.16

What's In It For Me? P.19

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PP 12578/03/2013 (032108)

Happy New Year!

Dear PT Family, wish you Happy New Year 2021!

We just celebrated the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ 2000 years ago. His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension have changed the course of human history - forever! From sin to righteousness, from bondage to freedom, from death to life, from mortality to immortality! But it all seems surreal!

Many ask, "If God is love, why doesn't he intervene and stop all this evil and suffering, especially during this pandemic?" Why is God so distant, unmoved, and uninvolved?

When God sent his son Jesus as the Savior of the world, not many believed, but Mary did. Indeed, she bore him and brought him into the world. You know the rest of the story. Jesus reversed history. He undid Adam's work. He abolished sin and death and brought righteousness and life to all. After his ascension, he sent his Holy Spirit to indwell us. Mary carried Jesus in her womb for 9 months, but we are carrying the risen Christ inside us permanently! The Eternal Christ is literally dwelling inside us! He has come to awaken us to the truth of his indwelling presence in us. He has come to change our mindset about God and about ourselves and others. He has come to transform us from inside out – in our spirit, soul and body. That's happening deep inside us now! Let's wake up to this reality! Let Christ indwelling Spirit consume everything that is contrary and opposed to his glorious purpose for us. Let him refine and mature us to his fullness and spiritual stature. All creation is eagerly waiting for this moment, and when it happens, we will see God's kingdom more clearly!

Jesus completed his Father's mission with resounding success! It wasn't a half-done job as many believe! Jesus's final cry was, "It is finished!" and he really meant it! He secured salvation for all. Christ lives inside us to change the whole world. Didn't Jesus say, "You will do even greater works"... "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher"? It's true – he wasn't lying! But not all believe, feel, or experience their new life in Christ at this time. However, once the awakening comes, thousands all over the world will manifest the indwelling Christ in them. That will be the dawn of the Kingdom Age! We will finally see God's glory bursting forth the whole earth! Amen!



By
Dr. P. Sellappan

Note from Editor to all PT readers:

I have been Editor of the Plain Truth magazine for the last 12 years - that's a long time! I thoroughly enjoyed my role as editor and writer. I learned many things, gained much experience, for which I am very grateful. I thank God for the opportunity given to me. Thank you for supporting the Plain Truth Ministry all these years! Your prayers, support and contribution mean a lot to us – they are greatly appreciated! We may not know how many lives you have touched as a result of your support and participation, but God knows! Please continue to support this ministry in the years to come.

With this issue, I will be stepping down as Editor, passing the baton to someone younger and more dynamic. I am very pleased to announce our new Editor, Mr. David Low. I am confident he (and his team) will inject new ideas and improve the quality of the magazine. You can look forward to more inspiring and uplifting articles. Please welcome him.

The Plain Truth Ministry is a team work. Please continue to extend your support to David and his team.

May God's favor and blessings be upon you all - now and forever!

Dr. P. Sellappan
(Outgoing) Editor

Happy
new
Year

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



5



7



11



12



16

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January - March 2021

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cover story

- 05 What Jesus' Incarnation Shows Us About What It Means to Be a Human**
Rick Shallenberger

articles

- 06 Believe and See the Goodness of God**
Helen Teo Walton
- 07 Trials: Where Are You, Lord?**
Michael Houghton
- 08 Why Linen?**
Wong Teck Kong
- 09 The Time Capsule of Hope**
Grace Communion International
- 11 Being Thankful in Tough Times**
Devaraj Ramoo
- 12 The Unexpected Messiah**
Dr. Joseph Tkach
- 14 Finding God**
Clayton Steep
- 16 A Lamp to My Feet**
Paul Hailey
- 17 The Act of Forgiving**
Anna Teo
- 18 Facing Up to Your Challenges In Life**
Tesa Mandias
- 19 What's In It For me?**
Sondra Peters

regular features

- 02 Editorial**
- 04 What our readers say**
- 23 Hmm...**

What our readers say:

Q. Some of my friends criticize me for not being a Christian because I am not keeping the standards, like attending church, Bible studies, prayer meetings, etc. How can I meet those standards?

A. Standards are used in everyday life for performance e.g. in business, industry, schools, sports, etc. They are used to measure, qualify, compare, on things like productivity, efficiency, results, and to define success or failure. Christian spirituality is not defined or measured by some human chosen standards, or by individual performance. It is a relationship of trust in the grace of God through acceptance of His Son Jesus Christ as our saviour. Biblical commands or instructions and spiritual disciplines are given to help Christians live out and experience their new identity as God's children. They enable us to develop intimacy with God who transforms us as we grow spiritually into Christlikeness (2 Peter 3:18). We are already loved, forgiven, sanctified, accepted, reconciled - we don't have to meet some "standards" to maintain our Christian status or ensure our salvation.

Sadly, people sometimes use their own "standards" to condemn others with a self-righteous authority. In the gospel accounts, the religious leaders often confronted Jesus in his earthly ministry because he apparently did not measure up to their standards.

Q. As a long-time reader of the Plain Truth, I notice you do not publish articles like prophecy, end times, current issues/events, various forms of theology, interpretative schemes, and other such topics. Why not?

A. The Plain Truth magazine "provides a message of practical help, hope and encouragement from a Christian perspective" as stated on page 3. It focuses on the central message of the gospel - salvation in Jesus Christ. The Plain Truth is not the forum for addressing controversial theological topics, issues or doctrines, unlike an academic journal or online blog, where competing or conflicting viewpoints can be presented and debated. However, it may occasionally carry articles that can inform or educate readers on such matters, to broaden their understanding from a Christ-centred perspective. But such debatable knowledge, doctrine or scheme should not be confused with the gospel or seen as absolute "Biblical or God's truth".

Kindly give us your comments, feedback and review to help us further improve the quality of our magazine. Please email your comments to plaintruth.asia@gmail.com

Thank you for your faithful support and participation in this ministry - your prayers, contributions and participation in the gospel - are greatly appreciated. Please continue to pray for us even as we pray for you.

Grace and peace to you from the Christ in you!

Although The Plain Truth is sent free of charge, it is not without cost. Each copy is made possible by the generosity of others. So we are very grateful for those readers who send a donation, and make it possible for us to continue to publish the good news of the Gospel. Donations should be sent to the addresses listed on page 3 or sent electronically to the bank account:

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What Jesus' Incarnation Shows Us About What It Means to Be a Human

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us¹ is arguably the most profound and exciting statement in the Bible. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, but the good news goes much farther than that. Salvation is not merely the removal of our sins – it is a new creation, a radical transformation of what it means to be human.

You might even say that Christmas is not only about Jesus; it's ultimately about you!

True humanity

When John wrote that Jesus became flesh and lived among us, he used an image the Jews were familiar with. The word translated as "dwelled" comes from root words meaning "to pitch a tent." It referred to God's dwelling among the Israelites in the tabernacle, a special tent that was the precursor to the temple of Solomon.²

The difference is that the Word – Jesus – didn't just dwell among humanity, he became human.

As the perfect human, Jesus is the definition of everything it means to be human. Whatever Jesus is, that is what he has made humanity to be in him. This tells you at least three things about yourself.

It tells you that God is on your side. Jesus is God's beloved Son in whom he is well pleased.³ Because your life is in Jesus, and he is your life⁴, you share in his personal relationship with the Father. With him and in him, you are God's beloved child.

It tells you that your sins have been removed. Isaiah 59:2 declares that sin separates people from God. When Jesus came, he took that sin upon himself so that we could be reconciled to God. Paul even says that Jesus became sin⁵ so that we could be completely reconciled to God.

It tells you that nothing stands between you and God. John 1:14 says that Jesus "came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus restored us to God through grace, without our input or help. We were reconciled even when

we were still sinners, Paul wrote in Romans 5:10. It's a gift.

Jesus restored us to God by taking our broken human condition on himself. He became the representative and the substitute for all of humanity. Paul sums this up in 2 Corinthians 8:9: "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus

Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." As a human, Jesus brings humanity into perfect relationship with God. As God, he brings God into perfect relationship with humanity.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:4-5, "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved." This is reconciliation at its finest. Paul went one step further in verse 6, saying, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly

realms in Christ Jesus." We are not waiting for God to accept us. Because of Christ, he has already accepted us, and this never depended on us.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), Jesus illustrates God's unconditional love for wayward humanity. In this parable the betrayed father represents God and the prodigal son represents all of us. The Father never rejected us – we rejected the Father. He eagerly awaits our repentance (turning our hearts back to him) and is watching for the first sign of our return. As soon as he sees us, he runs down the road to embrace us, honor us, and declare us his beloved child.

To be fully human is to know God

Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father. As Ray Anderson put it in his book *The Shape of Practical Theology*, "To know Jesus is to be confronted with the reality of God himself" (page 18). There is no difference between the heart of Jesus and the heart of the Father.

By
Rick
Shallenberger



- 1 John 1:14
- 2 Exodus 40:34-38
- 3 Matthew 17:5
- 4 Colossians 3:4
- 5 2 Corinthians 5:21

Jesus said he was one with the Father.⁶ To know Jesus is to know God.

In coming to be with us, Jesus showed us the Father's love and compassion toward us. He "pitched his tent" among us because he wants to be with us and to identify with us. God didn't turn his back on sinners – he came to live among them, to love them and to heal them.

God created us to be in relationship with him. This was the plan from the foundation of the earth. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:4-10:

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ... And he made known to us the mystery of his will...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Jesus was never "plan B." It was always God's plan and purpose to be in loving communion with the people he created in his image.

When "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," he didn't come to live in a tent or a temple. He came to live in us. He bound himself to us, taking up our cause, bearing and vanquishing our sinfulness. He called

By
Rick
Shallenberger

⁶ John 10:30

us his friends and made us his brothers and sisters, bringing us with him into the Father's embrace.

As Anderson said: Jesus confronts us with the reality of God. The Spirit leads us to Jesus, and when we know Jesus, we know the Father. When we are in communion with Jesus, we are in communion with the Father and with the Spirit.

To be fully human is to know God – to know he loves us, wants us, and will never let us go. Jesus heals and restores our full humanity, becoming for us the image of God into which we were created.

Jesus shows us what life is all about. It's about walking in communion with God – being in relationship with the One who created us, loves us, dwells among and in us, and adopts us as his own precious children.

Jesus shows us what it means to be truly human. He became a human for us, for our benefit. The story of his birth is about you.

Believe And See The Goodness Of God

Does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not. It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ. (Galatians 3:5 NLT)

God is the one who supplies His Spirit to us, works miracles amongst us, and blesses us beyond what we can think or imagine. The Holy Spirit working in us causes us to walk in His miracles and blessings. It is not because God is impressed by our good works, and not because of our prayers, our Bible reading, or our charitable works. We walk in the full blessings of God simply because we believe and trust in Jesus and His finished work.

When we do that, the Holy Spirit goes to work to illumine, lead and guide us on the paths and plans that God has prepared for us, leading us to the good place and position He has for us.

Therefore to walk in the fullness of all that God has for you, continue to look to Jesus and put your trust in Him. Cast your cares on Him and rest in Him. As you do so, God's Spirit is at work to supply you in every area of need; He supplies the miracle that you need, be it in finance, healing, relationship, or restoring you to wholeness, so that you reflect His glory and grace. The only part you need to do is believe.

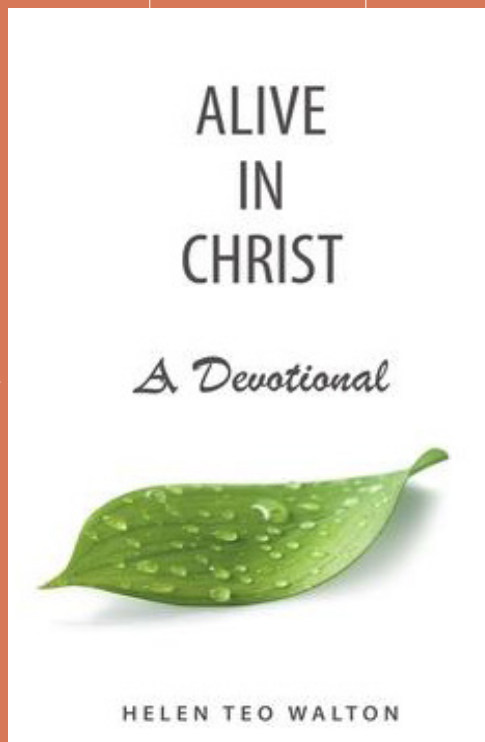
By
Helen Teo
Walton

Don't wait to see before you believe. But believe, rest in Him, leave all the fears and anxieties to Him, and start seeing His love, peace, joy, hope, healing, favour, and blessings. Believe and see with your spiritual eyes His favour abounding to you and doors open for you. See new opportunities come along, and those bad symptoms gone. See challenging situations become miraculously resolved, and things work out beautifully beyond your understanding.

When you hear and believe, and your heart yields to Christ, you allow God's Spirit to work in you, supplying abundantly all that you need. God wants you to walk in the fullness of all that He has for you. Believe in Jesus, trust Him, cast your cares on Him, rest in His love for you, and walk in His light and glory. Do not wait to see before you believe. But believe with your heart and start to see God's goodness.

Adapted from the book *ALIVE IN CHRIST A DEVOTIONAL* (a 140 days devotional) by Helen Teo Walton.

For copies of the book, email: helenteoct@gmail.com



Trials: Where Are You, Lord?

I had words with God this morning. Not the usual kind of words. These were blunt, direct words.

I was not happy with the way things were going, and finally, after several years, I had to ask God whether he had a plan in mind for me or not.

I was standing in the shower, well, actually in the bathtub under the showerhead. I was not feeling very well. I had been able to turn off the water without falling, but

I was not sure I could step over the edge of the tub to the floor and still remain upright. Since being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease a few years back, I have fallen frequently, and it seems that I am always nursing a sore neck or bruised knee or shoulder.

I looked around at all the hard bathroom surfaces—sink, commode, counter, cupboards, floor. I knew I was probably going to fall again, and I knew it was going to hurt. The frustration of anyone living with a long-term degenerative illness welled up in me like Mount St. Helens, and I blew.

I didn't ask God why I was ill. Instead, I screamed, "What possible glory can there be for you in this?"

I waited, hoping someone would miss me and come to check on me.

Then I screamed again. "What in the world is your plan here?"

Almost instantly I thought of the promise Jesus made when he said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

Without even thinking of how much more effective a bolt of lightning might be when the target was standing in water and soaking wet, I heard myself shout, "How can I even know you are there?"

It's pretty rare to see the Lord with your own eyes, unless maybe you're one of those guys on television. And how often does God show up and give you a few words of encouragement, or take your arm and help you out of the tub? And when was the last time Jesus came to your

By
**Michael
Houghton**

house with food on the day that you were just too tired to get up and spread peanut butter on a piece of bread? Or washed your clothes when you didn't have a ride to the laundromat or the strength to load a washer? Or read you

some scriptures as you drifted off to sleep?

How can we know if God is there? How can we know we're not alone in our trials?

Well, I made it out of the tub somehow, but the question continued to haunt me through dinner and into the evening. Suddenly, it began to occur to me that when Jesus fed the five thousand,

disciples were there. When he raised Lazarus from the dead, disciples were there. When he healed the lepers and blessed the little children, disciples were there.

My musings were interrupted by my four-year-old granddaughter, who walked over to my rocking chair and laid her sticky cheek on the back of my hand and smiled up at me. When I felt the warmth of her sweet touch, I looked down and she said, "Poppy, I am sorry you are sick." Tears flowed from my eyes, because I realized that Jesus had just answered my question. That's how I know he is there.

He travels with his disciples. Wherever they go, there he is. The hand that sends the card is guided by the Lord. The hands that prepare a casserole and the ones who deliver it are guided by the Lord. The friend who shows up to sit with you and just listen while you vent; he or she is guided by Jesus, too. And when my granddaughter smiles, Jesus is bringing his love to me right along with hers.

He travels with you, too. Every time you reach out to those around you, Jesus is there with you, ministering to those who need him. And every time a helping hand reaches out to you, it's Jesus behind it.

Paul wrote in Galatians 6:14, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." We are all Christ to each other when we meet each other in our need.

I still shout at God sometimes, and I know he doesn't mind. But no longer do I have to wonder if he's even there.



Why Linen?

Many years ago, I heard a short sermon by a church leader about why in the bible God use linen as a symbol of righteousness. I remembered that it was a very interesting sharing but cannot now recall anything about the contents of that sermon! Nevertheless, the message left a strong, lasting impression in my mind and I have always been curious concerning the meaning behind the use of linen as found in the bible.

As far as God's word is concerned, linen is the sign of righteousness.¹ This is further confirmed by the fact that Christ's army and the angels are all dressed in linen.² The fact that Aaron's priestly linen garments were considered sacred,³ and that priests must change to linen clothes when entering the inner court of the temple⁴ all point to the idea that linen is usually associated with holiness.

But the question remains. Why linen? Of course we know that cotton cultivation is not suitable for the Middle East and that silk making knowhow had not reached Israel at that time. Still, why not wool? Wool comes from sheep and the lamb symbolizes Christ. Wool is white in colour and whiteness may be linked to righteousness. But God chose linen. Why?

According to Wikipedia, linen is a textile made from the fibre of the flax plant which can vary in length from 25 to 150 mm. Producing linen is a time consuming and labour intensive process.⁵ This is because when the flax plant is harvested, it cannot be mowed. The flax has to be pulled up by the roots to maximize the length of the fibre and to preserve the full potential of the plant, which later can be used to make a variety of products.⁶

All these make linen rare and precious, especially in the ancient world. Similarly, God's righteousness is very precious. We have no righteousness of our own. We are righteous in God's sight only because of Christ imputed righteousness. It took his death and all the accompanying suffering for it to happen. It is more than precious, it is priceless.

After harvesting the flax plant (about 90 days after planting), the stalk must be separated from the fibre as linen is produced only from the fibre. This is accomplished

By
Wong Teck Kong

by putting the harvested stalks in water for a period of time to rot away the woody and non fibre material so that only the linen fibre is left. This process is called retting.⁷ Whether done by hand or through the use of chemicals, retting can only happen through the use of water, hot or cold.



When God first calls us and grants us the spirit of repentance, the next step that follows is to undergo water baptism as an outward sign of our acceptance of Christ as our personal saviour. We enter the water as the 'old' man and comes out of the water as the 'new' man, with all our sins washed away by Christ blood.⁸ Just like in retting, baptism can only be carried out with the use of water. As is in baptism, retting is to get rid of all the parts of the plant that prevent the creation of the linen product.

After retting, the next step in the process to make linen is called breaking.⁹ The stalks are sent through rollers to crush the decomposed stalks and to separate the exterior fibre from the bast which will be used to make linen.¹⁰ The final stop in breaking is when the fibre is finally released from the stalk.

From baptism onwards, the holy Spirit helps us to live a life worthy of our calling.¹¹ We are to be transformed to the mind of Christ.¹² The life of a Christian is one that is always seeking to please God, becoming less and less worldly, letting go of thoughts, words, actions and things that hinder his or her walk with Christ. We want to be more and more Christlike in all we do. Do you see the similarity between this and the breaking process?

Once the breaking is over, spinning then takes place. The individual fibre is useless by itself. It must be spun together with other fibre to be made into yarn which later will be weaved into different fabrics.¹³

Continues on page 13

- ¹ Revelation 19:8
- ² Revelation 19:14,15:6
- ³ Leviticus 16:4
- ⁴ Ezekiel 44:17
- ⁵ sewport.com
- ⁶ magiclinen.com
- ⁷ madehow.com
- ⁸ Romans 6:4
- ⁹ madehow.com
- ¹⁰ ibid
- ¹¹ Ephesians 4:1
- ¹² Philippians 2:5
- ¹³ madehow.com

The Time Capsule Of Hope

By
Grace
Communion
International

In the borough of Queens, New York, there is a neighborhood called Flushing. In Flushing you will find Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, the location of the 1939-1940 World's Fair. A highlight of the World's Fair was the "Immortal Well." Fifty feet underneath this well is buried the 1938 time capsule.

In this capsule, which is made of cupaloy—a metal created specifically for the capsule—are the items of everyday life in 1938. A Sears and Roebuck catalog, a pack of Camel cigarettes, a dollar in change and dozens of books on microfilm were enclosed. This idea was to tell the future (in the year 6939) how we lived, how we expressed ourselves, how we were human.

You might say Jeremiah does the same thing in this odd story from his life. He makes an act of hope to tell future generations that Israel was still around, but most of all to tell his current generation that they are people of hope.

Let's look at the context of where this story appears. Jeremiah has become a fixture in the culture of Jerusalem, having been a prophet whose career has already spanned twenty years. His message throughout is that God's judgment will come on Israel, and that it will come through Babylon. At the same time, and just as durable, is Jeremiah's promise of a hope and future for Israel.

Jeremiah was often called the "weeping prophet" and his book is laden with difficult-to-hear stories of judgment and destruction, a result of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Israel had taken up idol worship, even to the point of child sacrifice, and had abandoned the poor and vulnerable in their society. Hence God is restoring them to their identity as his people through judgment.

Right in the middle of these dark stories is this somewhat odd story of Jeremiah doing a land deal. Babylon is essentially at the gates of Israel when this occurs, and Jeremiah can probably see the smoke and fires of their encroaching camp through his window.

Because of Jeremiah's unpleasant prophecies, the king put Jeremiah under house arrest. What a fascinating

insight into power structure and status quo. How often have we locked up prophets? Throughout history, those who spoke truth, especially those who spoke it to powerful people, have been put on "house arrest" in one sense or another. There are the more dramatic of examples, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by Hitler. But there are many who are placed where their voice cannot be heard.

And so Jeremiah is on house arrest.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him.¹

Of course, this didn't slow him down when it came to being a prophet. Typical of the Old Testament prophet who stared down death and persecution regularly, Jeremiah kept acting out his vocation as God's prophet, and this time through action. Here's what he said:

The word of the LORD came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver.²

This is a fascinatingly strange move. Jeremiah is buying a field in a doomed area. This isn't a "wise investment" from any angle. The place he's buying is about to become a smoking battlefield when Babylon gets through with it. He's been prophesying for two decades now that Babylon was going to level Jerusalem, and now when they're right outside the gates, he buys real estate.



¹ Jeremiah 32:1-3

² Jeremiah 32:6-9

Then Jeremiah has his time capsule made. Or at least the equivalent of it:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time.³

Putting legal documents in an earthenware jar was a common practice back then. It was like a safety deposit box. For generations afterward, the documents would be safe and available to prove something had been done. Yet Jeremiah knows full well that the documents will mean nothing very soon. The land, even if he owns it, will be a burnt-up nowhere. But it won't stay that way forever.

That's why this is more like a time capsule than a safety deposit box. This is not Jeremiah making an investment in the future as much as a statement about the future: We were here. We lived. And we believe that God will restore us.

You have to love the closing line of the scene:

Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.⁴

As the people of God, we are people of hope, we:

1. Believe in hope
2. Act in hope
3. Live in hope

Believe In Hope

Jeremiah did this famous land deal not because the prices were rock bottom or as a psychological defense mechanism against the reality of the invasion, but because he believed in the future.

Yes, times were terrible, but Jeremiah knew it wouldn't be that way forever.

For behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come.⁵

In God's world, the seasons change. Life may be dark right now, but the light of spring will come. Whatever it is you're going through here and now, the flowers will appear again on the earth in time.

The devil is the ultimate absolutist. Every time something horrible happens—the diagnosis comes back or the marriage disintegrates—he'll try to convince you that this is how life really is and always will be. He tries to convince us that the center doesn't hold, and the only thing that's "really real" is disappointment and loss.

But as the people of hope, we know that life is more complex than that. There are seasons of pain, for sure, but seasons of plenty and peace as well, and the best is yet to come.

In the end, Jesus' death was temporary, and his resurrection was permanent. The hardest ice melts and makes water to help the wildflowers grow. As a forest burns, the heat of the fire opens seed pods allowing new growth to occur. As people of hope, we believe in hope. We don't believe that war, pain, hardship, devastation, addiction, and sickness have the final word.

Act In Hope

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time.⁶

Jeremiah acts in hope. He doesn't just have some kind of airy, vague feeling about hope—he acts on it. He takes concrete action to show his hope. This isn't an investment in his future—this is an investment in THE future. He's pretty sure he won't even be around to claim this land. He's acting in hope.

There's an ancient story of a rabbi named Akiva, who in A.D. 135 was tortured to death by the Romans. As they skinned him, the rabbi's disciples could hear him singing the Shema: "Hear, oh Israel, the Lord your God is one..." This was the passage the Jewish people sang constantly as an act of identity. In the midst of his torture, right before his death, his biographers say he sang the Shema simply because it was "the time to sing the Shema." He wasn't crying out in a deathbed prayer, he wasn't screaming religious rhetoric, he was praying because it was time to pray.

In his action, like Jeremiah, he showed that God's math, God's reality, doesn't run by our rules. He acted in hope. Jeremiah acted in hope, leaning on God's promise that "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land."

Live In Hope

As the people of hope, we live in hope. Hope is where set up camp. We believe in hope, we act in hope and someday we will live in the fullness of that hope. Listen to Paul as he writes to his disciple Timothy, which is another reading from our lectionary readings today.

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.⁷

Our hope is not in what we have, but in knowing who has us.

Paul continues to tell Timothy who to focus on:

He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see, to him be honor and eternal dominion.⁸

Paul talks often about living in hope—the life that is free of the trappings and addictions of the ego. Hope is in the life that finds sustenance in Christ and doesn't require that sustenance from other people and pursuits that can never satisfy. Hope provides a life of freedom.

So Jeremiah puts the deed in an earthenware jar. And generations past have put symbols of their lives in time capsules and buried them. The cross of Jesus is the symbol that reminds us to believe in hope, act in hope, and live in hope. This is the message that hope—not hate, sin, or despair—will have the last word and "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land."

³ Jeremiah 32:14

⁴ Jeremiah 32:15

⁵ Song of Solomon 2:11-12

⁶ Jeremiah 32:14

⁷ 1 Timothy 6:6-9

⁸ 1 Timothy 6:15-16

Being Thankful In Tough Times



I just finished reading an article on the internet on how the year 2020 was an absurd year for the nation, full of depressing events. The Covid-19 pandemic had devastated the lives of many, causing unemployment, financial difficulties, even relationship crisis in families. The political atmosphere also was far from stable. Crime and corruption seem to be at an all-time high. As the year 2021 begins, one would wonder if there is any hope of a better tomorrow? Would the pandemic continue to wreak havoc in people's lives? Would the economy improve? Will the unemployed find jobs? Is peace and harmony guaranteed? There seems to be more room for worry than optimism. It may sound strange, even ridiculous for me to propose that we should start our new year not with worry but with thanksgiving.

We have all become so busy facing challenges, upheavals and depressing news that we have failed to be thankful for the blessings that we did receive throughout the year. Perhaps we should pause and start recognizing that every good thing we have received comes from God, and without God we would have nothing. Have we stopped to realise that through the danger of Covid-19 God has kept us safe? Have we realised that He has given us our daily bread? Have we realised that no matter how bleak the situation, He remains our hope? Many are enduring tough times now but it is during these tough times that we need to be most aware of the need to give thanks in everything. Does that sound strange to you? You might ask me to put myself in your shoes and face your problems and see how I would feel!

The Apostle Paul points us to the right direction. In the



By
Devaraj Ramoo

epistle to the Philippians he says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."¹ In times of great difficulty and distress where could we find peace that guards our hearts and minds? Is it not the peace that comes from God alone? Most of us are constantly in a state of anxiety. We get up in the morning and start our day with worry. Friends, family, philosophy even religion does not do much to bring comfort or solutions. If God is the solution and thankfulness the way, how do we begin finding this peace of God? Well my friends, it begins with the person of Jesus Christ.

In the gospel of John we read of a gift that Jesus left behind for His disciples before His crucifixion. He said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."² That same peace is available for all who put their trust in Jesus Christ. Therefore, to be at peace in times of great difficulty and crisis is a wonderful reason to be thankful. Why is Jesus the source of peace? Could we not receive peace from other sources? Many will say that meditation, religious rituals, chanting, nature walks and many other ways are available. True, but the peace that comes from Jesus Christ is unique. It stays with us, lives in us, thereby creating a constant mind-set of thankfulness in the depths of our being. How is this possible?

¹ Philippians 4:6-7

² John 14:27

Continues on page 13

The Unexpected Messiah

Why didn't Jesus go down in history as a failure? In fact, why did he go down in history at all?

He lived on earth at a time when his people were expecting a Messiah to deliver them from the Roman occupation. It seems there were many zealots and fanatics eager to appoint themselves to that position. Some even gained a following, but their efforts came to nothing. Most died unknown, and even those we know about are just footnotes in history. However, Jesus is not a footnote in history. He remains considered one of the most influential, if not the most influential, human being who has ever lived.

When he was crucified 2,000 years ago, his followers were left in confusion. Most were expecting the Messiah to be a royal military leader who would overthrow the enemies of Israel and be honored by the Jewish religious leaders as king. This would be the proof of his Messiahship and this is what they expected Jesus would do.

Just a few days earlier, he had entered Jerusalem to the acclaim of the crowds. At last, it seemed, he was going to make his move and lead them in a war of liberation against the Romans. Then he would establish his kingdom, restoring the fortunes of his people. Those who had followed him would be given key positions. But before the week was over he was dead — executed like a common criminal, rejected by the religious leaders and his followers went into hiding.

No one (except for Jesus) expected this to happen. Although there were different ideas among the Jews about what the Messiah would do, there were some common themes. Being crucified was not one of them. In fact, coming to such an end would have been high on the list of events proving someone was not the Messiah. So why did his followers continue to believe in a Messiah who, instead of leading them to victory, only seemed to have brought ignominy and suffering on himself?

Let's look at it from the disciples' point of view. Clearly, Jesus did not fulfill any of those common expectations for the Jews of his day. Instead of routing the Romans, he came as the Prince of Peace, not even carrying a weapon. He was born in a borrowed stable and buried in a borrowed tomb. He was executed in mid-life by a method reserved for slaves and common criminals. So, why would his followers maintain that he was the Messiah? Why would they not just cut their losses after his death and move on? Why would they even be willing to be killed themselves for this Messiah?

By
Joseph Tkach

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright explains it well:

There were, to be sure, ways of coping with the death of a teacher, or even a leader. The picture of Socrates was available, in the wider world, as a model of unjust death nobly borne. The category of "martyr" was available, within Judaism, for someone who stood up to pagans... The category of failed but still revered Messiah, however, did not exist. A Messiah who died at the hands of the pagans, instead of winning [God's] battle against them, was a deceiver... Why then did people go on talking about Jesus of Nazareth, except as a remarkable but tragic memory? The obvious answer is that ... Jesus was raised from the dead. (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996, p. 658)

Suffering would not have been necessary for the kind of Messiah the people of his time were expecting. He could have lived to a ripe old age, and then have been enshrined in legend and history like David, Joshua, or Gideon. Even if he had lost his life in a struggle against the Romans, he could have had a place of honor. But to live in relative obscurity and then die in disgrace — what kind of a Messiah is that?

But Jesus was so much more than a military hero. He had come, not just to deliver Israel from the Romans, but to rescue all humanity from captivity to evil and death, and reconcile humanity to God. And to do that, he had to suffer and die. On the very day that Jesus rose from the dead, he spoke of himself, saying, "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26 NASB).

The full glory of the Messiah is seen on the cross. This was an important point that Jesus' disciples had missed until after his resurrection. Many still miss this point today. The glory of Jesus as our Savior was not shown only through his power and resurrection, though it could have been. His glory certainly was not shown through any status or position he had on earth. Rather, his glory was also shown in the incredible suffering he willingly endured as an expression of his immeasurable love for those he came to save.

As Paul wrote to the church at Philippi:

[Jesus] being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8).



After his resurrection, the full realization of who Jesus was, and what he had come to do began to sink in. As his followers absorbed the wonder, grace and glory of both his crucifixion and his resurrection, they were transformed. Led by the Holy Spirit, only then did they begin to fulfill his "Great Commission," taking his message of forgiveness of sin, victory over evil and death, and of salvation to the whole world. Convinced of the truth and reality of who Jesus was and what he had accomplished, not even the suffering of hardships, persecution and, for some, execution could stop their proclamation reaching "to the uttermost parts of the earth." And we today are the beneficiaries of their mission and ministry that was handed on to others who were also faithful channels of God's own reconciling and renewing work down through the generations.

As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Let's take time to renew our own sense of wonder and commitment, as we each do our part in carrying on the Great Commission. It is a message this world needs. It has been well said, "He may not have been the Messiah all had hoped for, but he is indeed the Messiah of great hope for all."

Continued from page 8

The same goes for a Christian. We are not to be individual or 'stand alone' believers (unless circumstances do not allow us to meet together). We are called to fellowship with God and with each other. A hallmark of the Christian community is that we assemble ourselves in worship and fellowship.¹⁴ There are many reasons why the followers of Christ meet together regularly, one of which is that more can be done when we do service as a group than as individuals. Christ can combine people from all backgrounds and formed a new humanity that is greater than the sum of its parts.¹⁵ In the same way, a single linen fibre is useless until it is spun with others to make threads which in turn can turn into beautiful tapestries of fine linen.

¹⁴ Hebrews 10:25

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:15

¹⁶ The Spruce, Lauren Flanagan, 08/04/19

¹⁷ Matthew 5:13

¹⁸ Wikipedia

The finished linen product is naturally antibacterial, which made it a popular choice for bandages for centuries.¹⁶ Not surprisingly Christians clothed in God's righteousness are called the preservative or salt of the world.¹⁷ Linen is also immune to attacks by moths and beetles.¹⁸ The spiritual holy garment of righteousness put on us by Christ will be able to deflect the attacks by Satan and its allies.

As we can see, God chose linen to represent holiness because the process of making linen parallels that of a Christian's walk to righteousness. Now that you have read the article, you should be able to answer the next time someone asks you 'why linen?'

Continued from page 11

It is possible because of who the person of Jesus Christ is. Jesus was not an ordinary human being who walked the earth. He is God in the flesh that lived as one of us. Scripture reveals His real identity. He was the Word who existed in the beginning with God and was Himself also God. All that was created was made through Him.³ He also became flesh and dwelt among us as Jesus Christ.⁴ As God with us He gave His life that we may be saved from the consequences of sin, that is, death. In fact He promises us peace from the greatest fear confronting every human being – death.

Recently I watched a video clip interview of a very prominent actor who had achieved worldwide fame. Despite all his achievements he had a fear of impending death. He stated that he was afraid of what was waiting on the other side once he dies. Isn't that what every human being grapples with? We could proclaim ourselves as believers of God, atheists or put ourselves in the 'I don't know' category. Yet at the back of our minds remains the nagging thought, especially when we get old, "What really awaits when we die?" Would everything go blank, back to nothingness or does God promise something extraordinary?

³ John 1:1-3

⁴ John 1:14

⁵ John 6:40

⁶ John 11:25-26

⁷ Psalm 37:25

Well, Jesus who walked the earth gave a promise to everyone who believed in him. He clearly stated that God's will is that everyone who believes in His Son Jesus Christ receives eternal life. That means everlasting life after being raised from the dead by Jesus Himself.⁵ That may be an unbelievable statement for many but Jesus Himself declared that the resurrection from the dead is by Him alone.⁶ As the Word who always existed, and became Jesus Christ, He has all the power to give us eternal life. It is a matter of believing Him.

We are indeed in bleak times, but as tough as it gets we can always walk with a thankful mind-set. The Lord does reach out and give help in our most desperate times. The Lord does care about the suffering that we are enduring. He even offers eternal life for those who trust in Him. Let the year 2021 be a start toward optimism even when conditions are bleak. Let us be among those who choose to be thankful in tough times for as King David said, "I have been young and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread."⁷ May your lives be richly blessed in the New Year.

Finding God

I found it!, a sudden rash of bumper stickers boldly proclaimed some years ago. They referred to the discovery of God, the discovery of a new life in Christ. Most bumper-sticker readers gave fleeting attention to the message. Some were irritated. They began to display a bumper sticker of their own: "I never lost it!"

The truth is, however, we've all lost it—"it" being the intimate and personal relationship Christians can have with God. We had this relationship and we lost it—in our first parents, Adam and Eve. God created them in his image to mirror his character and his righteousness.

The ultimate purpose of all humans is to reflect God's glory forever, and in so doing, to partake of God's immeasurable joy. Human beings were made to be in contact with God—in an intimate relationship with him. Deep and enduring joy comes only from personally knowing him.

Our first parents had that personal contact with God. They could have maintained that relationship, enjoying all the benefits and delights that were part of it. If they had, how different the human story would have been! Unfortunately, humanity's stay in paradise was brief. A rebellious, lying spirit entered the picture. Satan seduced Adam and Eve, telling them that if they disobeyed God, they would find even greater happiness than they had. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, and they fell or crashed into a state of sin. They made a choice that changed everything.

Alienated from God

Sin is contrary to God's righteousness and holiness, and works against all that God represents. Sin produces misery, suffering and grief. God hates sin because it hurts people. He does not compromise with sin.

Once Adam and Eve opened the door to sin and rebellion, they alienated themselves from God. They exchanged righteousness and holiness for sin and evil. And it wasn't only Adam and Eve who sinned. Everyone—the entire human race—has followed in their footsteps. That's why Paul wrote in Romans 3: "There is no one righteous, not even one" (verse 10); "all have turned away" (verse 12); and "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (verse 23).

Each of us has a sinful nature that spiritually alienates us from God. We are sinful. No aspect of our nature is untainted by sin. Until sin's hold is broken, it reigns over

By
Clayton Steep

us. Sin forms a barrier that disrupts our fellowship with God and interferes with us receiving the richness of his blessings in Christ.

For us to be reconciled to God, sin had to be dealt with. The barrier had to be broken down so we could find him. That is why God came in human flesh as Jesus Christ. So greatly did God want us to be reconciled to him, he provided that Jesus would suffer the results of sin—death—for us. "God so loved the world," John 3:16 simply but eloquently states, "that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, "he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9). Because Jesus did this, our sins are forgiven. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Ephesians 1:7-8).

The way back

God's greatest desire is for us to find the way back to him—to find him. To an audience of unbelievers, Paul spoke about God's desire that people "would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him,

though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). So greatly does God want us to find him that in Jesus Christ he paid the ultimate price to make it possible.

But where is God that sinners may reach out for him and find him? Actually, he is everywhere. He is, as we have read, "not far from each one of us." We humans have lost contact with God, but he has not lost track of us. He knows everything about us. "'Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?' declares the Lord. 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?'" (Jeremiah 23:24).

God is near. He is next to the bed of the infirm. He is in the cell of the lonely prisoner. He is as accessible to us when we are riding high in life as he is when we hit bottom. Whatever our status or condition, we need only to reach out for him in repentance. When we accept and believe in Jesus Christ and repent of our sins, we find that our sins have been pardoned. The only "barrier" between us and God turns out to be our own attitude.

Our first birth did not make us spiritually complete persons. That is why Jesus said we must be "born again" (John 3:3). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).





God designed us to experience the satisfaction of an ever-increasing knowledge of him. But, without responding to the Holy Spirit, a person feels incomplete. He or she feels an inner emptiness, a longing for fulfillment. We all need a lasting relationship with God. And we should have it. But people have tried to fill this spiritual void with inferior substitutes, among them sensual pleasures, material possessions, fame, and worldly pursuits. At best, they yield temporary exhilaration. But it is just that: temporary.

C.S. Lewis said: “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased” (The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses, page 2). Instead of the mud pies with which we seek to satisfy our inner longings, God offers us infinite joy, lasting joy. Why settle for less when we don’t have to?

A joyful relationship

On becoming a Christian, a person enters an intimate relationship as a child of God. Christians who have entered this relationship have “found” God. (Actually, what they have found is that God already knows them and accepts them.) They have what is most important in life. Nothing else is essential for joy. Not riches, not fame, not pleasures, not even health. Though they add to one’s happiness in Christ, they cannot of themselves yield lasting contentment. What matters most is the joy that comes from being reconciled to God through Christ, and from communion with him.

In one of his kingdom parables, Jesus spoke of the

By
Clayton Steep

joy in finding God. He said: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matthew 13:44). Jesus was not teaching that to become a Christian one must sell all earthly possessions. One point illustrated by the parable is that the discovery of the kingdom of God gives more joy than anything else in the world.

And the initial joy a newly converted Christian receives is only the beginning! Finding God is not merely like finding a gold coin. Rather, it is like finding an inexhaustible gold mine. It takes a whole lifetime extracting the riches of this mine. The more you mine it, the more pure and abundant its yield.

Once we find God, we begin to find fulfillment in life. And we set out on the most important of all quests—to know God. J.I. Packer expresses it well in *Knowing God*: “What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance; and this the Christian has in a way that no other person has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God?” (page 34).

How do we come to know God? One way is to become familiar with the Bible, which describes God’s actions, desires and emotions. The other is to learn to trust him by following his instructions. The resulting vital, growing relationship with God is the basis for a meaningful life here and now. But it goes beyond that. It is the basis of our hope for immortality.

Jesus prayed to his Father concerning his followers, saying, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3). You may know about God, but confidence in having eternal life comes from knowing him.

A Lamp To My Feet

Our lives are filled with decisions, mostly trivial such as what items to buy when shopping, or how we spend our leisure time. Other matters such as food choices, sleep habits, and exercise will affect our health for years to come. Decisions about education, career, marriage and religion are even more vital to our personal success and well-being.

We benefit when we make life choices wisely. How can we do this in our complicated and unpredictable world?

By
Paul Hailey

Jesus is our lamp

God will guide our life when we ask him to. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”³ “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”⁴

A rich promise! When we do our part in seeking wisdom and looking to God he will guide our lives in the direction that he wants us to go.

Doing our part

Scripture gives instruction on how to make wise decisions, especially the more important ones.

When appropriate, we can ask for advice from friends or others who have faced similar decisions. The book of Proverbs contains several verses such as this, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”¹ We may also glean advice from books and other sources.

You and I may wonder what decisions God would like us to make. We can become overly concerned about simple day-to-day decisions, thinking they all are important to God. But he is more concerned about our character than he is about our minor everyday choices.

However, when we face those extremely important decisions, we should seek God’s guidance.

Looking to God

Our Creator knows you and me better than we know ourselves—our abilities, shortcomings, potential, and possible pitfalls if we make unwise choices. He wants us to be successful, and gives us wisdom when we ask for it. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”²

Wisdom is normally defined as “the appropriate application of knowledge.” That certainly is important, but the wisdom that God gives has little to do with this world’s education. Instead, it is not factual or intellectual, but behavioral. Godly wisdom brings the ability to discern between right and wrong actions. God grants this priceless gift when we ask for it in prayer and through study of Scripture.

Besides doing our part in seeking wisdom, Jesus will become our personal guide when we put ourselves in His care.



Unless you or I have a special calling from God, he does not directly reveal specifically what decisions we should make. Instead, he guides our life path in ways we may not recognize. I can look back on difficult times in my life and recognize that God guided me into certain relationships and opportunities, much to my benefit and happiness.

You and I benefit greatly when we go to God in prayer and openly discuss matters of concern and ask, “Lord, please direct my steps in the way you would like me to go.”

Where will the Lord lead you?

We would like to know exactly where the Lord will direct our lives. But typically that is not the case. Consider the example of Abram (later renamed Abraham). “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’”⁵ “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”⁶ He ended up being richly blessed and became “the father of the faithful.”

When we put ourselves in God’s care we may not know where he will lead us. But let’s be assured, it will be for our benefit.

The sayings, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,” and “The first step is always the hardest” are truthful and meaningful.

As Christians, our most meaningful step is to put God first in our lives and ask him to guide us in the way we should go. We then will have the Lord’s promise, “I (the Lord) will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.”⁷

Let’s ask the Lord to illuminate our paths! We will be blessed with the assurance that he will watch over us and guide us in ways that will be pleasing to us and to him.

¹ Proverbs 15:22

² James 1:5

³ Psalm 119:105

⁴ Proverbs 3:5, 6

⁵ Genesis 12:1

⁶ Hebrews 11:8

⁷ Psalm 32:8

The Act of Forgiving

Allow me to share my experience in dealing with hurts and learning how to forgive. I was nursing some deep hurts many years ago. I had cried for days without anyone knowing. So much so I had allowed these emotions to rob me of my smile. A Shiatsu therapist I saw for my chronic back pain told me : “there’s a deep sadness in you”. (She had detected the ‘blocking of Qi’, a circulatory ‘flow’ of energy in our body for wellness). I broke down and cried. She was right.

I carried on with life by getting busy and shutting away all the hurts and sadness by not thinking about it. I was traveling extensively with my husband so that was a form of ‘escape’ for me. But every time there was a trigger or a trip like in a circuit breaker, all those emotions came back... and I became withdrawn and depressed all over again. I tried to deal with it through music, exercise, yoga etc. It helped a little but the root cause of it was very much left intact and unaddressed. I had safely tucked them away at the back of my mind, hidden from sight. My Christian walk and prayer life were also lacklustre and almost non-existent. Being young, I wanted to live my life, my way. I had not heard, known or understood anything about living the ‘Christ in me’ life.

It took me a good five years to stop feeling hurt and another five years to forgive. Like the title of a worship song, ‘Yet not I but through Christ in me,’ I learned that I could not forgive by myself, by my own strength and effort, no matter how hard I tried. It is because we don’t really know how to love. We are able to love because Jesus first loved and showed us how to love. Having experienced His true love for us first, we begin to learn to love as He loves. The same is also true with the act of forgiving. We learn to forgive because He first forgave us and showed us how to.

Colossians 3:12-13 (TPT)

Love One Another

12 You are always and dearly loved by God! So robe yourself with virtues of God, since you have been divinely chosen to be holy. Be merciful as you endeavour to understand others, and be compassionate, showing kindness toward all. Be gentle and humble, unoffendable in your patience with others.

By
Anna Teo

13 Tolerate the weaknesses of those in the family of faith, forgiving one another in the same way you have been graciously forgiven by Jesus Christ. If you find fault with someone, release this same gift of forgiveness to them.

There were a few issues I had to grapple with:

1)stop looking to someone for the acceptance we so long for, not even from our spouse or our loved ones. God has already accepted us as we are. He loves us for who we are: our brokenness, our failings and weaknesses...

2)learn to ‘let go and let God’. Make that decision today to let go of the hurts and surrender them to God, we can pray:

“Lord, take all these wounded feelings of emotions, hurts and wrong attitudes away from me. I’m going to rest and find peace in You alone Lord. I know not how to forgive fully yet, but Lord I rely and lean on Your healing grace and strength to help me to forgive eventually. I can’t do it on my own... but in Jesus, all things are possible. So I submit and hand everything to Your loving hand and care.”



3)don’t allow any negative feelings the slightest chance to grow and get a foothold on us again. Whenever we feel really down for no reason, just go somewhere quiet and alone. Sit still and let His presence comfort, heal and minister to us. We can pour our hearts to Him. Sometimes, no words are needed. Let our tears do the talking. God knows, He really does. He’s our best Listener, Therapist and master Physician for our broken and hurting soul.

The secret of our joy lies in the Lord. We have to keep going to Him and

draw from Him, the Source of our Living Water: “Seek the Lord and His strength; Seek His face evermore! (Psalm 105:4). His mercies are new every morning. How true that is. God knows we will face new challenges daily, and He provides us fresh anointing, mercies, grace etc., without us having to ask.

I was reminded of the life of King David: he committed all kinds of heinous things: adultery, murder etc. But God didn’t hold any of David’s wicked ways against him. God forgave and accepted David wholeheartedly and loved him unconditionally whenever David went to Him in repentance... God never reminded him, saying, ‘remember David, you committed this and that...!?’

Continues on page 23

Facing Up To Your Challenges In Life

In the book of James we are reminded to rejoice in difficult times.

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2). What is the mindset behind this attitude, as this surely goes against our human nature? The bible also tells us not to lean on our own understanding and to submit to His ways (Proverbs 3:5-6). In this light we could use our triggers, our negative emotions, our hardships to our advantage. Trials give us opportunities to see what is in our heart, is it doubt and fear when we are squeezed and hard pressed, or faith and hope? Do we believe in His promises, founded on His love, or do we try to work things out with our own capacity and leave Jesus out of the picture, trying to create solutions with our flesh while struggling in self effort in survival mode?

One thing we need to realise is that we cannot live this Christian life. Only Jesus can live it through us (Colossians 1:27). It is essential to make a paradigm shift. We don't focus on dying to self, we focus on His overwhelming enabling power in us, by hearing (John 10:27) and seeing Him with the eyes of our heart (Ephesians 1:18).

Think along these lines. We fight from victory ground through intimacy with Jesus, we do not fight for victory, Jesus said it this way: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Only by the power of the Holy Spirit in us are we able to learn what that really looks like. Not as a concept but dropped into our hearts by revelation, by experientially getting to know Him. The word, ‘yada’ (‘to know’) explains this.. You shall KNOW (yada) the Truth and it shall make you free (John 8:32). The same word was used in ‘Adam KNEW (yada) Eve and they conceived’ (Genesis 4:1). We get to practice this by going into His presence, as Psalms 100:4 explains : “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.” In the midst of a trial, we could challenge ourselves to place the troubles on a shelf for a moment, to abandon self and thank Him for the good we have, the things we so easily take for granted, and offer Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise. This is a way to quiet our ever labouring, ‘wanting to figure things out mind’, and to become aware of who He is and what He so willingly can do for us. He doesn't only hold our solutions, He is our solution, it might not be what we expected, but it will be perfect.

The story of Jacob wrestling with God and not wanting to let go, until he received a breakthrough is a good example of how we too need to come and wait on God until we get a breakthrough. God gave Jacob what he came for and changed his name from Jacob (meaning Supplanter) to Israel (meaning Prince). This is an example of what our struggles and looking for solutions with Him may feel like

By
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at times (See Hebrews 4:11, Genesis 32:22-32).

Knowing and resting in Him need to be cultivated, it comes by revelation of the Holy Spirit in us, pointing to Jesus, who is the living Word. His truth and ways are imparted to our spirit man, to overcome our soul (mind, will and emotion). Only Jesus can do that work in us, through being in an intimate relationship with Him.

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) We cannot change ourselves or others. But He can, He is gentle and always willing, an ever present help in times of need. In all the trials we face, we can keep the objective, that it can work for good for the salvation of our souls, as stated in 1 Peter 1:6-9 : “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.” When we accepted Jesus as Saviour our spirit was saved (John 3:16). Heaven is our eternal home. But now we have this one opportunity to allow Him to co-labour with us for the salvation of our souls too.

Continues on page 23

What's In It For Me?

A wife once said to her husband while he was watching a football game, "If I didn't know better, I'd think football was more important to you than I am."

His response, "When the game is on, it is!"

Are you devoted to God like that husband was devoted to his wife?

Are you devoted to God one day a week or maybe just for the two hours you're in church?

What consumes your energy, your time, your thoughts? Is it your job, making money, making more money, your hobby, your favorite sports team, the news? On the other hand, how often in your day do you think of God or the things pertaining to God? How often do you talk to God? How well do you know God?

A person may consider himself to be a Christian because he believes there is a God; he may consider himself a Christian because he goes to church; he may even believe that there was a man named Jesus, who died on a cross. That doesn't mean he worships God or loves God or even has a relationship with God.

I know, because I was one of those Christians.

Someone who knows me quite well mentioned to me the other day, "You didn't use to be so religious." He was right, unfortunately. I attended church, was quite involved with my church actually. I prayed a little, on occasion. I read my Bible, a little, on occasion. I knew of God, but I didn't know God. I revered God, but I didn't love God. Of course, I didn't know that I didn't know God.

How do you love someone you can't see? The same way you love someone you can see.

I didn't come to love God until I started to really talk to God. I didn't start to talk to God until I started reading my Bible regularly—just a chapter a day. None of those things occurred until I hit a crisis in my life. But the point is, I considered myself a Christian. Perhaps I was what

By
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you would call an "unsaved" Christian. God wasn't so important in my life that reading His word took priority. I thought of prayer as an obligation instead of spending time with a loved one.

Be honest with yourself. Is God a priority? What are you living for? Or what is the most important thing to you?

You might be thinking one of two things:

(1) Why should I make God a priority? After all, I'm doing okay on my own.

(2) If I were to put God first, what's in it for me?

You find your purpose — why you were born

Without purpose, life is simply a rat race—wake up, go to work, work 8-12 hours, come home, sleep, get up the next day and do it all over

again, until you're too old to work and then you wither away until you return to the ground. Few people will remember you, and when they're gone, it will be as if you never existed. That's a very depressing thought!

Knowing God (not just knowing of God, but getting to know God) makes life worth living. Life makes sense, when you make God a part of your life. When you see the big picture, you realize you are a part of that big picture! Your life matters!

What is the big picture? It's simply becoming a member of God's family for eternity.

A couple of years ago I asked a group of young children I was addressing if they ever had to do a book report. I said that maybe your teacher has asked you to summarize a book in one page. I held up the Bible and told them that I could summarize this thick book in one sentence. Here it is: "God wants you (and your family) to be in His family for forever and He tells you in this book how he's going to do it." This one little boy named Jayden jumped out of his chair and exclaimed incredulously, "Why hasn't anyone ever told me this before!?" He obviously felt that someone had been holding out on him!



Becoming a member of God's family will happen if God is more important than anything else in your life. Does that mean that the other things (family, jobs, hobbies) don't matter? No, they still matter, but God comes first. You will find that the people in your life benefit when you put God first. You become a better parent and a better spouse and a better employee/employer.

By
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You receive eternal life

All of mankind was forgiven when Jesus Christ, who never sinned, died on the cross. All sins (past, present and future) were covered in this one act of sacrifice. But forgiveness is not the same as salvation. Salvation comes when you say "Yes!" to what He's offering.

You aren't afraid of death

When you put God first, you know that death (your death) is simply phase one. It's temporary.

Death is not an end, but the transition to a new beginning... When we let go of the hand [of the deceased] we do so with the deepest conviction of our souls that without faltering or fumbling someone else is taking that hand. (On Being Human, p. 143, by Ray Anderson)

Does that mean you want death? By no means! In Philippians 1:23 Paul says he was torn between wanting to be with Christ and wanting to serve and minister to his fellow Christians, but that didn't mean he yearned for death. Knowing all that Paul went through (the multiple beatings and imprisonments), made it obvious that Paul never gave up. Paul had peace in whatever his fate was. Peace. That's something that is very underrated.

You belong and you know that you belong

Humans have a need to belong (hence the quote by John Donne, "No man is an island.") When you acknowledge that God is your God, and Jesus is your savior, you belong to God—you are His. You become a part of a community of believers, and that community is worldwide.

When our son was very young, he wanted brothers and

sisters so badly. He said he wished that his best friends, could come live with us. I told him that their parents would miss them. His response, "Well, they can come too!" On one occasion, as we were getting out of our car at the grocery store, a van pulled up beside us and a passel of kids tumbled out. He looked at them longingly and made some comment about how nice it would be to have brothers and sisters. However, he was quite disillusioned one day when he watched the

neighbor's kids walking home from the bus stop. The brother and sister were yelling and throwing rocks at each other!

He felt that he was missing out on relationships.

The point is, we need to belong and we need relationships. God is all about relationships. He embodies relationships. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—three persons, one being. That's a pretty tight relationship. Just like our son, God wants all of those He loves (and that's all of mankind), to live with Him and have a relationship with Him! He created you to need relationships. You may be very comfortable by yourself, and that can be good, but do you want to be completely alone?

God the Father is offering you a family—with a perfect father and brother.

You have someone to turn to

Do you ever get tired of being responsible for everything in your life? Do you ever wish someone would say, "Let me take over for a while and you take a break." If you live paycheck to paycheck

or if you have a sick child, you know what I'm talking about. You are exhausted from having the weight of the world on your shoulders.

On the other hand, some may think, "I want to be in control of my own life. I'm not relinquishing control to anyone!" Even when we think we're in charge, we're not. These past months during the pandemic should convince us of that. We are in control of very little. As I write this, here in the U.S., wildfires on the west coast have consumed five million acres. Entire towns have been wiped out and 27 people have died. The bush





fires in Australia were only put out in March this year, after 45 million acres and approximately 3,000 homes burned, and 34 people died. As I write this, a hurricane hit our southern coast earlier this morning. Many are dealing with flooding and even more (500,000) are without power. For months now, the U.S. has been reeling with riots and the destruction from those riots. Between natural disasters, man-made disasters, sickness and death, your nation's economy, whether you live in the eastern or western hemispheres, whether the storm in your world is called a hurricane or a typhoon, you are not in control!

I know that regardless, God is with me and He is in charge. He is active (not passive) in my life. No matter what happens to me or my family or my job, I know that He has allowed my circumstances for a reason. I'm not floundering at the mercy of time and chance. I know that when I ask God for something, if He says no, there's a reason. If He says yes, there's a reason. And the reason? My salvation.

Romans 8:28 says that "all things work out for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose." What is the "good" in Romans 8:28? We know from the context of the chapter that Paul is referring to salvation. All things happen for the salvation of those who love God. That is the ultimate goal! "All things work out for" who? Those who love God—that's up to you—and those who "are called according to his purpose." Who is that? All of mankind. God beckons all, because He wants all of mankind saved and to live with Him for eternity.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is

By
Sondra Peters

acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

This reminds me of another lesson I was teaching a group of young children. I brought to the class a canvas bag of bricks I'd wrapped individually in pretty paper. I let the children try to pick up the bag, which they couldn't. Then I asked each child, "What do you worry about?" (Most of them worried about their moms or grandmas, but a couple mentioned a bully at school.) As each child answered, I gave the child a brick and said, "This is your worry. Now carry this around for a while, and when you go to bed tonight, take it with you and lay it on your chest." They realized pretty quickly that the heavy brick only got heavier. I then told them, "This worry is too heavy for you to carry. Let God carry it. Give your worry to him—let him take care of it."

It's a great comfort knowing that God is in charge.

Freedom

Many would assume that putting God first would be giving up freedom, but the exact opposite occurs. You're only giving up things that hurt you and you're giving up guilt and worry over your life after death. There's freedom in knowing what your future is.

I once told the children that many people think that you have to give up fun when you become a Christian. I said, "That's not true! I still have fun, I go to parties, I take trips and go on vacation!" They looked even more surprised than I had expected, which confirmed that they had been told that the life of a Christian was dull and no fun.

There's freedom in knowing that God's love is unconditional—you don't earn forgiveness or salvation. There's nothing you can do to make God say, "I give up. I've had enough!" We don't trust people who renege and we wouldn't trust God if He said, "I'll love you if you do (fill in the blank)." Even if you reject God, He will still love you.

Paul said, "I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love for us" (Romans 8:38-39). Not even your sin, whatever it is, will make God not love you.

If our forgiveness or even salvation was dependent on how well we obeyed or loved, then we would be walking on eggshells, waiting for the cut, because we don't and can't do anything perfectly. Even if you choose (and it's your choice) not to worship God, He still loves you and has forgiven you. And do you know what your punishment will be? A life—and eternity—without Him. It's not a punishment He has meted out. It's a punishment you have meted out to yourself.

Forgiveness and salvation are gifts and that's why it's called grace, but God is not going to force salvation on anyone.

You are probably familiar with the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The son wants to do what he wants to do, when he wants to do it, and how he wants to do it. He's tired of answering to the old man so he demands his inheritance. The father knows it will do no good trying to change the son's mind. He's not going to force the son to stay, so he gives the son his inheritance. The son leaves home and does exactly what he wants to do. The son "squanders his wealth in wild living" until he runs out of money. The only job he can find is feeding a farmer's pigs. He goes hungry, wishing he had what the pigs had, and finally comes to his senses and heads for home. He has a lot of time to think on his long journey home. He rehearses his apology and plans to

By
Sondra Peters

beg his father for a job as a servant. As he nears home, his father, who has never stopped loving his son nor hoping for his return, sees his son off in the distance. The father runs to his son, throws his arms around his child and kisses him. The son tries to apologize for his behavior, but the father doesn't need to hear the apology because he forgave his son the moment the son rejected his father. Then the father throws a big welcome-home party for his son.

You are the child. God has provided every good gift to you, but you don't want to live like a member of His family. You reject Him. You want to do life your way. He doesn't force His will or His way of life on you. He allows you to do exactly what, when and how you want. He's just biding His time waiting for you to see that there has got to be a different and better way of life. You've been forgiven for your rejection, and He's never stopped loving you. Now, He's just waiting on you.

I picture many kneeling at Jesus' feet on judgement day. This is simply my mind wondering what it will be like. I wonder about those who have not known Jesus or even believed that he was our savior. How will they not be convinced that he is our savior when they look up at the beautiful face of a man who lived thousands of years ago, a face that literally radiates love and mercy and compassion. He may say, "Come to me, all who are weary of living life without me." I picture many saying "yes" to Jesus. I know Jesus will be very convincing! My question is, "Why wait until then?" Why deprive yourself of the blessings of knowing God now? Jesus said in John 12:32, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." With His finger in a crook, He is beckoning you to him right now.

Life may not be very good for you right now or life may be very comfortable. Regardless, your life will be better knowing God. With knowing God, comes great comfort, joy, contentment and peace. Who doesn't want those things? God wants to rescue you and give you the life you were born for.



"Resolution One: I will live for God.

Resolution Two: If no one else does, I still will"

Jonathan Edwards

"He only who is reduced to nothing in himself, and relies on the mercy of God is poor in spirit"

John Calvin

"Error never shows itself in its naked reality, in order not to be discovered. On the contrary,

it dresses elegantly, so that the unwary may be led to believe that it is more truthful than truth itself."

Irenaeus of Lyons

"When someone steals another's clothes, we call them a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money

which you hoard up belongs to the poor"

St. Basil the Great

"Prayer without study would be empty. Study without prayer would be blind."

Karl Barth

"We are the Bibles the world is reading; we are the creeds the world is needing; we are the sermons the world is heeding."

Billy Graham

Continued from page 17

The same perfect love and forgiveness was depicted by God, the Father to His wayward son in the story of the Prodigal son. No questioning, no accusations, no demand for an account for what the son did with his inheritance etc. Nothing of that... And without any reservation or hesitation, the Father demonstrated His total acceptance of His son by clothing him with the finest clothes and putting on his finger, the Father's 'signature' ring which is a seal of authority to represent Him! How amazing is that? Which human father would do that? This left me pondering: is there any sin our Father in heaven can't and won't forgive us for? None.

I remember reading these lines somewhere:

"-forgiving someone is letting go of our hands on the person's neck.

-forgiving is not for the person who did us wrong or has offended or hurt us but it is solely for ourselves.

-by forgiving, we release ourselves from that hurt, that burden, that 'sentence' we carry with us.

-forgiving is the freedom from that 'debt owed' to us."

Scripture tells us in 1 Peter 4:8 (TPT) : "Above all, constantly echo God's intense love for one another, for love will be a canopy over a multitude of sins." ("The footnote explains the Greek verb echō can also mean "to be so closely joined to something that you become its echo." In this case, we join ourselves so closely to God's love that we "echo" his forgiving, fervent love toward one another.")

So, make the decision to forgive that someone today... ask and let God show you how.

Continued from page 18

Whatever the need calls for, may we increasingly receive the understanding on how to deliberately focus on Him, this is something we can ask Him for (Mark 11:24, James 1:5). May we press in to receive His peace that surpasses understanding, a purpose of will to hear and obey. Bringing our cares and troubles to Him, and to have Him exchange them with His Life, through a change of heart, an unveiling of Himself. "Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2

Corinthians 3:16-18)

He came to seek and save the lost, and it is Him whom we seek to behold and be transformed. When we see trials through this perspective, they have purpose. And doesn't the enemy, the devil, hate it when we can keep our joy in Him even in the midst of a trial? "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:4-7)

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