

A dramatic sky with dark, heavy clouds and a bright lightning bolt striking down towards the horizon over a body of water. The lightning bolt is the central focus, illuminating the surrounding clouds and the water below. The overall mood is intense and powerful.

**'FROM
FEAR
TO
FAITH'**

Author: Bill Partington

'FROM FEAR TO **FAITH'**

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Correspondence to: billpartington1@gmail.com

About the Author

Born in 1953 and raised in a Christian home, the son of an itinerant preacher, Bill Partington made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ from the age of 10. In his early 20's he attended a Discipleship Training School course at YWAM (Youth with a Mission) in the USA, followed by a mission trip to Mexico.

Following a career in sales Bill was ordained in 1992 and spent the following 2 years traveling as an itinerant preacher in the UK, India and the Philippines. In February 1995 he began working for UCB UK (United Christian Broadcasters), promoting the ministry and building the distribution of their daily devotional and the database of supporters. He served in various positions in the organisation, including as Promotions Manager, Head of Ministry, Head of Strategic Ministry Relations and, most recently, Head of Affiliate Development - where his responsibility was to help several UCB affiliated ministries across Europe to grow and impact their own nations more effectively.

Since leaving UCB UK's employ in April 2019, he has continued to serve on the board of trustees of various UCB ministries in Europe, whilst also returning to itinerant ministry, preaching across the UK as well as much further afield.

He has preached in over 10 nations, spoken and operated in many more – and now heads up the ministry, Global Missions, serving Churches, Conferences and Outreaches.

He and his wife, Therese, have been married for 40 years, have two sons, one daughter, a granddaughter and a grandson. Together they have hosted around 10 tours of Israel and hope to plan more in the future.

ENDORSEMENTS

I am head of a large Indian Mission in South India. There are more than 120 churches with several helping projects. We reach both north India and south India by planting churches & several projects. I travel widely to many countries preaching the Gospel. I met Rev. Bill Partington in one my travel. I met him in his father's house in Stoke-on-Trent in England. When I heard his preaching I found out that he has anointed preaching and apostolic word of God. He invited me to his house where I found out that he also has evangelistic ministry which made people to respond by accepting Jesus as a saviour and also favours the miraculous happening. I invited him to India. Large crowds of people were blessed through his prayers and people started to attend his meeting in larger members. He was invited to several countries in Europe, USA and Eastern countries. I found him to be a very humble person and man of prayer. People wanted him to be the head of several organizations in different countries. His ministry in UCB (the media ministry) expanded to reach many countries of the world. He and his wife has become a model of a ministry. Wherever he goes he leaves unforgettable memories of his meetings and fellowship. I wish him a source of harvest of many souls. He is honest and faithful minister whom I recommend.

Rev. D.F. Hallelujah Israel, Village Evangelisation of India Mission. Chennai, India

I have had the pleasure of knowing Bill Partington for a number of years and have even had the privilege of ministering alongside him on mission in Chennai, India. As the founder / CEO of Out of the ministry I was delighted when Bill came on the advisory board of our ministry. Bill also worked full time for numerous years at UCB Christian Broadcasters as Head of European Affiliate Development. His natural and more so, his spiritual gifts, knowledge and experience are an asset to any ministry or organisation. Bill is a down to earth person and is known for reaching out to support the average lay person in developing and achieving their potential. His commitment to preaching and teaching the Christian message is second to none. I would recommend Bill Partington to any Christian ministry knowing that they will gain a man full of integrity, passion and drive.

Evangelist Peter Gladwin, Founder and CEO, Out of the Ashes Ministries, UK

We have known and served with Rev Bill Partington for many years as trusted friends and confidants. His life and ministry is marked with integrity, humility, longevity and consistency. A strategic Kingdom leading connector who flows with and across the five-fold ministry worldwide. He always brings a word in season, always building and encouraging. A leaders' leader.

Pastor Terry Eckersley. River Network Church, Matlock, Derbyshire, UK

Bill has a heart for evangelism, he has supported local mission in the Staffordshire Moorlands working with various churches, to promote the Kingdom of God, to my experience from as early as 1990 when we worked together on the "JIM" campaign and tent mission at the local carnival. He supported fully my missionary work in Romania, which started in 1994 and continues today, and has been a spiritual encourager. In 2009 we pioneered a new church plant and Bill and Therese have supported, encouraged, and been a blessing to the church. We look forward to Bill's regular ministry to the church and he is well received and well-loved when he comes.

Pastor Chris Longhurst. Cheadle New Life Centre, Staffordshire, UK.

I met Bill and Therese in England in 2014 when I moved with my wife to the UK for 7 months. They immediately welcomed us as part of their family, and encouraged us in every aspect of our lives. I have never met anyone more helpful than Bill at any time of day, always ready with a resolute word in the difficulties of the ministry. Through his experience of wisdom and spirituality, he always has an idea of how to get out of difficult situations. For several years now we have been working together to spread the Gospel through the media in Italy, and for us they are a point of reference in the decisions and development of Italian projects. Bill and Therese are reliable, humble, helpful and loyal friends. My wife and I are happy to have them as an active part of our organization in Italy. At least twice a year we spend time together, and every time we are always encouraged by their enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, preaching, passion and love for people and for God's work, which they transmit to us all the time. God is using them and will continue to use them for the advancement of His Kingdom - and us with them.

Michele Plasmati, Pastor of the Assemblies of God Church in Varese, Italy, and President of UCB Italy

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Chapter 1

PREFACE

Early in 2020, news began to reach us that the coronavirus, or Covid 19, was beginning to spread rapidly from China, where it appeared to have begun, into mainland Europe. No one, certainly everyday laypeople, had any idea how much this would affect the world in the coming months, nor the fact that it would soon be classified as a pandemic. One of the first places it impacted was the northern region of Italy, where we had close and dear friends, pastors of a large church and leaders of a national ministry which reached many thousands of people across the whole of the country. We began to pray for them, and wrote to tell them the areas and issues for which we felt to pray. As we did so, I realised these same things would be what we would need to consider and seek the Lord over, particularly as, in the following few weeks we in the U.K. would be affected in similar ways. This book was birthed from those prayer points.

Being a Christian, a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ, does not mean that we do not face troubles, battles and all manner of situations equally, if not, seemingly at times, even more than non-believers. However, as a Christian, we have the reassurance of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to guide and bring us through the battles that assail us to a place of victory. Sometimes we have to battle and overcome the turmoil of the heart and mind that such challenges can stir up within us. In addition to those “everyday” situations we face, the Bible also forewarns and prophesies that in the days before the Lord’s return, things will happen on the earth that will cause the hearts of even “tough guys” to fail them for fear – not being sufficient of themselves to resolve things. We too, as believers, have to face and fight the natural tendency to fear and panic, much like the rest of mankind.

Luke 21:25-26 “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; *Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*

Having said this, let us draw one very big, distinctive line in the sand – and state that fear does not come from our loving Heavenly Father. God does He send things into our lives that we, in and through Him and His abiding presence in and within us, are unable to overcome. He has, indeed, already overcome all of these negative things on our behalf.

2 Timothy 1:7 “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

1 John 5:4 “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

1 John 4:18 “There is no fear in love; ***but perfect love casts out fear***, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”

It is, I think, helpful and encouraging to consider that the phrase “casts out” in this verse could perhaps be substituted by a number of other words and phrases that are synonymous with “casts out.” Take a few minutes to substitute that phrase, “casts out” with one of the following, and I am sure it will drive home the power of what God can do in our hearts when His perfect love dwells with and within us.

Perfect love: disseminates, evaporates, dissolves, breaks-down, takes-away, displaces, diffuses, bans, casts away, throws out, chucks out, banishes, disperses, discards, excludes, shuts out, cuts out, breaks down, ousts, rejects, boycotts, expels **ALL FEAR!!!**

We will see in the forthcoming pages that faith is the opposite of fear. There are effectively two forces pulling in opposite directions. And yet we know from this verse in 1 John, having faith alone does not necessarily cancel out all fear. Having a perfect, heart to heart, face to face, intimate, loving relationship with our heavenly Father will cast, or drive out, all fear from our hearts and lives.

As we prepare for present and, indeed, future battles, we are going to look at a number of things I believe God is wanting to instil, install and develop within our hearts - and things that we can pray He will speak into the hearts of our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ. These are things we all need and things we should pray and believe God for in our own lives and the lives of our fellow saints. We often tend to accept that fear, anxiety and worry are inescapable facts of life. If we are in charge of our lives, we have every reason to fear, be anxious and to worry. But if we acknowledge Jesus as Lord of all, and recognise that God is in charge of our lives, then fear, anxiety and worry are obviously unnecessary and actually counterproductive.

Isaiah 40:28-31 “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But those who wait on 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.”

Before we move on, we should establish the most right and correct place for fear, and that is the fear of the Lord. In a number of scriptures, including Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10, we are told that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. In other words, having a heartfelt, reverential fear of God is the starting point from which we set out on our

walk with the omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God, creator of the heavens and the earth, and all that is contained within them.

It is a wise person who figures out early in their life – and in their Christian walk – Who to fear and who and what there is no need to fear. In Luke 12:4-5, we are told that Jesus told the multitudes of people who were following Him, “And I say unto you my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.”

Throughout our natural lives, fear may stalk us as the things that happen and pressures of life come against us but, as the American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, said in his first inaugural speech in 1933, “...the only thing we have to fear is...fear itself.” We must not allow fear to attach itself to our hearts but, instead, attach our hearts to Jesus Christ Himself, the author and the finisher of our faith.

In the following pages we are going to consider some of the things we are so easily worried and concerned, anxious and even fearful about. And we will consider some of the things that can help us to counteract the impact of, and act as an antidote to, the negative state of mind that can so easily become engrained in us, by helping us to walk in the truth of God’s Word.

Chapter 2

PREPARATION

In these unprecedented times, when so much is happening in the world around us, it is a natural response that when mankind as a whole, fail miserably to have the answer to the things that come against us, we can easily be tempted to fear.

Before reaching that point though, we must recognise that many of us are “doers”, action-orientated, “alpha male” or “alpha-female” types who are so accustomed to being the macho man/woman. Those macho types are so fired up with adrenaline and endorphins, when presented with the obstacle of a formidable enemy or a pending or present confrontation, that “fight or flight” surge of adrenaline rises within our veins like a volcano on the brink of an eruption.

However, even these warrior types find that there are times when they fail to be able to come up with a life, or situation-changing solution to the attacks that come against them. They are then left floundering in unknown waters having, for the vast majority of their lives found their resident strength, fortitude and resilience has generally scared off most foes – leaving them to limp off with their metaphorical tails between their legs.

What do we do when all else has failed – when our own strength has been insufficient to see off this particular attack? And, like it or not, those attacks do and will come.

Man was never made to thrive, survive or even exist without God. Each and every one of us need God – and must be born again as the Bible teaches. We all need to be born anew, washed and made clean from our sin and wrong doing – and have the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten

Son, living in and with us. That is the very first – and essential step each one of us MUST take in order to have victory in our lives over sin, sorrow, fear and, ultimately, death itself.

The saying goes that there a “God shaped blank in the heart of every man, woman, boy or girl, which only God can fill.” 1 Corinthians 1 also tells us that God has actually chosen weak, base and foolish people - and people who “are not”, in themselves, to “bring to naught” (an old English term meaning “to be brought to nothing”), that minority of mankind who appear to be the giants and superheroes we mere mortals admire, but seldom resemble.

The battlefield of the mind can be the scene of much pain and trauma – and it is a place where we all wrestle with our thoughts, our imaginations and our innermost insecurities and fears. It has been said that more battles are fought in the heart of a man (or woman) than have been fought on the battlefields of this world throughout all history.

We will speak more of this later, but let us begin by saying that we, as mere human beings, were never created to fight and win over every problem and difficulty that comes against us – **IN OUR OWN STRENGTH.**

Living without the Almighty God in our lives leaves us empty and unfulfilled. We may, and usually do, try to fill that inbuilt “God shaped blank” with almost anything and everything, unless and until we come to a realisation that everything in this life is, in finality, empty and vain. Until we meet Jesus – and ask Him to come and live with and within us, and begin to walk out our daily lives with His indwelling presence in our lives, we will always remain empty and helpless.

The first step in overcoming all the things we cannot handle in ourselves is, therefore, accepting we cannot make it without Him. We then have to

choose to surrender to His authority and Lordship over every aspect of our lives.

Even as a Christian, life, as someone once said, is not hard, it is IMPOSSIBLE. That is, it is impossible unless you live it with Jesus Christ Himself empowering you to live victoriously – living His life in and through you. One of the toughest lessons we all need to learn, is that even when you are a Christian all of our problems don't just miraculously disappear. But we soon realise that it is only with Him living in and through us that we can survive the turmoil that life throws our way.

It is, therefore, so encouraging to know He has also prepared a suit of supernatural armour that is able to protect us from every attack that could possibly come against us. When a youngster called David, who later grew up to become the man who penned most of the Psalms, arrived at the battlefield where the Children of Israel were facing the Philistine army, Goliath taunted and provoked the Israelites to send out their best against him. No one was brave enough to step forward until this slip of a teenager said he, in God's strength and in His name, would fight the giant. No doubt everyone would have laughed at David's audacity, but eventually King Saul agreed to let him go down into the valley and confront the enemy – stipulating though that David should only do so wearing his, King Saul's, armour. But Saul was a big man, much taller than the rest of his countrymen, so David quite rightly turned down the offer – saying not only would Saul's armour not fit him, but he had not tried and tested it, to get accustomed to walking and warring with it on.

That, I believe, is one important lesson for us, as we'll see in this important scripture.

Ephesians 6:10-18 “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle

against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

The first point to note is that the armour we are instructed to put on and wear is GOD’S own armour. If David said he could not fight in King Saul’s armour, how can we mere mortals expect to be able to wear and fight battles in the armour belonging to our almighty God, the creator of the Heavens, the earth and all that has ever been, is and will ever be? How that could work, practically speaking, I won’t even speculate, but just marvel that Jehovah somehow adapts that armour to fit each and every one of His children. The point I’m wanting to emphasise here though is that this is GOD’S own, personal armour – and if it’s good enough for HIM, it’s certainly going to be good enough for me – to withstand all the onslaughts of any and all enemies that would dare to come against us.

Many, many thousands of sermons have been preached and, no doubt, hundreds of books have been written on the subject of the armour of God. But time and space prohibit us from, and there is no necessity, to repeat the countless and well founded and articulated points that have already been said on the subject. We will only highlight a few – with the sincere suggestion that not only should you read and study, but also spend time meditating upon these scriptures and the depth of meaning hidden in the words.

“Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”

As previously mentioned, some people are naturally strong, physically, emotionally and psychologically – and have the fortitude to withstand many an onslaught against them. But we’ve also seen – and many of us have learned the hard way, through the “school of hard knocks”, that we are not as resilient and superhuman as we’d sometimes like to think. But here we read that whichever category you or I fall into, we need to be strong IN THE LORD and in the power of HIS might. We are not to rely upon our own strength – even if we have any, small as it may be. We are to recognise and rely upon His indwelling presence, strength and ability, determination and stickability to overcome any and all things that come against us.

“Put on the whole armour of God.”

We are to PUT ON, to make a deliberate choice to “put on”, in the same way we choose in the morning every item of clothing we want to wear for that day – in light of what we are going to be doing, where we plan to go, what the weather is going to be like and the people we are going to see and interact with.

If we are working in the garden, on the car, lifting heavy and awkward shaped weights, going to the gym, going for a run or a bike ride, meeting an important visitor, going to church or for a job interview, etc., we will choose the appropriate underwear, skirt or dress, trousers, shirt, maybe even a tie, jacket or suit, footwear and overcoat, all depending on how we deem it appropriate in light of the situations we at least believe we will encounter that day. It’s unlikely that, unless we are planning to go straight out of our bedrooms into a swimming pool or the sea that we’ll dress in just our swimming costume. Even then it’s likely that we’ll choose appropriate footwear, a towel and some other covering to wear on the way there!

Here the scriptures tell us emphatically to put on the WHOLE armour of God – so that we are ready and appropriately dressed and prepared for whatever may come our way.

“That you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

And the reason we must dress appropriately each and every day and each and every time we venture out from our “secret place of the Most High” (Psalm 91:1), is because while the physical weather may not be inclement, we do have an enemy, the devil, who is going around like a roaring lion, seeking opportunities to devour us, to steal from, kill and destroy us. We must, therefore, be ready and equipped to withstand his wiles and his attacks.

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

We may, and often do, feel like we are battling people on a daily basis, but actually the source of every attack against us, in finality, comes from the devil, the father of lies, who uses any and all means to defeat us. We must therefore be fully equipped to protect ourselves against his plans and schemes.

“Therefore, take up the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.”

As previously mentioned above, we are instructed to take up and wear the WHOLE armour of God, recognising that each and every item is not only essential, but that it has a particular function and purpose. Do not consider unnecessary and obsolete any of the clothing that God considers essential in the battle you and I will encounter each day. “Going commando” is not wise – even if you consider it something you want to do in order to prove your masculinity! We’ve already established that you are weak in and of yourself – and in need of all the help you can get in this life just to survive and withstand all that comes at you from day to day.

“And having done all, to stand.”

Having clothed ourselves with the whole armour of God, we are not now suddenly and immediately ready to show off our prowess, to strut and exhibit our newly acquired clothing, like someone who has just bought a new outfit, suit, or even a car – and wants everyone to notice, compliment and admire them. As 1 Corinthians 4:7 says, “What have you got that you did not receive and why do you boast as if you had not received it”? (paraphrase). We are told simply to STAND.

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth.”

Many sermons have and will expound the importance of having truth integrity in our lives as a covering for all our weaknesses and potential failings. But here I will share what comes to me when considering this item of clothing.

First and foremost, one description for this item of clothing would be a belt. Just think, a belt may look smart or basic, expensive or cheap, but its primary function is to hold your trousers or skirt up. Without that belt your trousers or skirt may fall down and leave you exposed. Link that to the above comments about truth and integrity, and you will see that we continually need God’s mercy and grace to keep us secure in Him and His righteousness, knowing that without His mercy and grace we would all too easily fall into sin and the condemnation of the devil. Our belts would fall and expose us for what we are without Him, weak, prone to fall into sin and shame. His truth covers our weakness. His enabling grace makes us able to stand before all that would point a finger at us.

Add to this the concept that this item of armour is like a “utility belt”, which brings a whole new dimension to the meaning. A utility belt is the belt a workman, builder or joiner/carpenter would wear around his waist when he is working on a project. In and attached to it are a range of tools, such as a hammer, screwdrivers, pliers, cutters, a tape measurer, a pencil, etc., etc. In other words, things that he is likely to need to complete the

job while he is, for instance, high up on a ladder or in another awkward position – without the need to return time after time, endlessly, to pick up one item to do the next task, then again for another tool to do the next, and so on, hour after hour. Having such a utility belt, correctly equipped, means he too is fully prepared for every eventuality. What a great example of how we need to be ready and equipped for every possible eventuality that the enemy could throw at us.

“Having put on the breastplate of righteousness.”

The breastplate covers our heart. In Proverbs 4:23 we are instructed to “Keep (our) heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” Our hearts and minds will lead us all over the place. How many of us have sat in a church service somewhere and a thought crosses our minds that takes us in our imaginations to some other place – indeed anywhere in the universe other than where we are physically.

Add to that concept that Paul instructs us in Colossians 3:2 to “**Set** your affections (or our minds) on things above, not on things on the earth.” It’s a decision of our own hearts, that we have to choose to SET our mind on the things of God, on things that are in line with His Word and His desires for us to walk in His will and with His peace ruling in our hearts.

And let us be honest here, and admit that there are times when our bodies may be present somewhere, but our hearts would much rather be somewhere different. We may be in church – but we would rather, on some occasions, be at a football match, or watching a particular TV programme – or doing a myriad of things other than what we are physically doing at the time. That is why we sometimes need to have a “change of heart” and mind – and make a commitment to bring them in line with where we have situated our bodies. Either that, or we decide to take our body where our hearts have wandered off to - and would rather be on this occasion. You decide!

Then, when our minds or hearts reunite with our bodies, we may feel guilty and under self-condemnation for being like the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane – when Jesus rebuked them for not being able to “watch with (Him)” for even an hour without falling asleep. There are probably hundreds or even thousands of times when we’ve needed and need to remind ourselves that we are righteous, in a right-standing relationship with God, that He is not surprised and shocked at us and our tendencies to fall and fail Him. In fact, He knew exactly what we were like when He saved us – because it was “while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). We need to keep that breastplate of His righteousness covering our hearts so that when our hearts condemn us, we still have the assurance of His favour and blessing. (1 John 3:20).

“Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace”

We considered earlier the decisions we make on a daily basis regarding the proper, correct and appropriate clothing we choose to wear according to what we are planning to do on any particular day or occasion. In the same way, as a follower and disciple of Jesus Christ, like the original twelve He called to follow Him, we are called and being trained to be “fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:9, Mark 1:17). In addition to that, we have what we term as the Great Commission, the command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, to be His witnesses and to make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Acts 1). On an earlier occasion in the gospels, when Jesus sent His disciples out to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, He told them that if they were shunned, rejected or simply not received, they were to shake the dust from their feet, to leave and carry on to the next location. Interestingly, by comparison, in Isaiah 52:7 we are told “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” While we know that in one sense, this is, of course, speaking prophetically of Jesus, the Messiah, who would be coming into the world, I believe it is also speaking of the way the Lord prepares each of us. He equips and

empowers us to take this Gospel message into the whole world – so that whosoever receives that good news and believes upon and trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ, accepting that His death, burial and resurrection enables them to be forgiven of their sins and enter into life, will be saved and have everlasting life. Those feet are the ones prepared and shod by our heavenly Father to take the Gospel of Peace to this needy world.

“Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”

The devil is committed to bringing about our downfall and destruction, and will attack us in the areas of our bodies, minds and emotions. Often this will be through temptation to sin in our bodies or minds, but many times it will be through an attack on our faith, our belief system and our confidence in God and His ability to deliver us and bring us into victory in various areas of our lives. This is why it is imperative that we take up the shield of faith in God and His Word so that we can fend off the fiery darts of the enemy. It is the main and primary defensive piece of our armour – and we are an open and easy target if we do not take it up daily.

“And take the helmet of salvation.”

It goes without saying that a helmet covers our heads, physically the highest point of our bodies. We could survive, albeit with a measure of difficulty, without a limb or even some relatively minor organs in our bodies, but we cannot live for one minute without our head. It's the part of our body we could say was THE most crucial and the one we do our utmost to protect more than any of the others. God provides a cover for that most crucial area of our make-up, physically and metaphorically speaking.

Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

There are areas in which God challenges and expects us to take steps to protect ourselves, both with His armour and by disciplining our own selves, our hearts and our minds. Here, in Paul's letter to the Philippians, we are told to make a deliberate choice to think on things which are pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy.

Then, in Psalm 23 we read that "He anoints our head with oil." Bear in mind here that the analogies David, the former shepherd boy, uses throughout that Psalm are describing life from a sheep's point of view.

(Psalm 23 "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever").

So, what does the statement that He anoints our heads with oil actually mean? We've all seen how easily sheep "go astray", just like Isaiah 53 says. They are fascinated by the grass that, at least to them, "looks greener on the other side of the fence." We often see them poking their head through fences and hedges trying to reach something that to them is so much more appealing than that which is, literally, right under their noses. Often these sheep get their heads stuck in the process of pushing through a narrow gap. To avoid that happening, the shepherd will sometimes cover (or anoint) with oil the wool on the sheep's head so that if and when that happens they effectively have enough lubrication to stop them getting permanently stuck somewhere where they could easily die – or be attacked and killed by predators – such as foxes or wolves.

The Lord knows we're just as likely to "go astray" because some crazy idea drops into our heads. So, in order to protect us from our own stupidity, He anoints our head with oil. And we are also instructed to wear our helmet of salvation – to protect us from the attacks that come against our minds and influence our decision-making faculty.

“And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”

Certainly, in the homes of most Christians in the western world there sits multiple copies of the Bible, often rarely opened, gathering dust on shelves and bookcases, coffee table and bedside tables. The challenge we all face is that what is written in that book will do us no good unless we read, accept, digest, remember and live out what it says. When the devil tempted Jesus, he called into question Jesus's position, His provision and His power. And on every occasion Jesus answered him by quoting the written Word of God – from what we now term the Old Testament. With an eternal perspective, seeing the “big picture”, we know that Jesus Himself was and is the Word of God. He created the heavens and the earth by speaking them into existence. In the natural realm, Jesus knew the power and authority of the Word of God, that even though heaven and earth pass away, the Word of God will never pass away, so He had every confidence in quoting the written Word of God as a weapon to defeat the enemy's attack. If it's something Jesus Himself would do, how much more should we internalise His Word and use it to defeat the devil. As Selwyn Hughes once said, “The Bible is God's one and only published work,” which just shows the level of importance He puts on what is written therein.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”

I have seldom heard anyone speaking about the whole armour of God go beyond the physical armour; the belt, the breastplate, the footwear, the sword, the shield and the helmet. What few seem to comprehend is that prayer is every bit as much an important and vital part of the armour as any of those things. No army, or individual soldier, is sent out to fight a

battle on their own. None of us are called to be a modern-day Rambo! Each of us are part of a collective fighting force and, as such, are sent out by our Commander in Chief, King or Queen. We are under our King's authority and command, and are, therefore, expected to stay in touch and communicate with our sovereign leader, asking for direction and orders – and obeying them without wavering or questioning His authority. If soldiers are unsure of what to do next, they communicate with their headquarters and obey the instruction they are given as a result. This is the same as is expected of us in the battles we face daily.

“Being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

Similarly, as mentioned above, while we are individual and unique “soldiers”; we form part of a fighting unit, a group of like-minded, well-trained and well-equipped team members who are called to fight in unity one with another (rather than fighting one another). The Marines have a tradition of never leaving one of their number behind on the battlefield. They each have a care for one another and look out for each other's safety and well-being. So, we, as members of the Body of Christ, are called to be ever watchful for the attacks that the enemy may throw at us from day to day. We are expected to watch out for one another and ensure each of our “comrades in arms” comes through the battles which they, like we, are fighting.

As we conclude this chapter, let us consider that both of the above quoted passages of scripture were written by the Apostle Paul. Despite the fact that Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, he recognised and openly stated that he was weak and in need of the grace and mercy of God to enable him to survive and prosper in this earthly realm. Paul called himself the “chief of sinners”, said that in him, in his natural self, was no good thing. He knew the depravity that was in his human body and mind, evidenced by his frustration at the end of chapter seven of Romans, where he states openly that the good that he

wanted to do, he failed to do, and the sin he no longer wanted to do, he still had a tendency to do. There is a sense of relief in the way he opens chapter eight, saying “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.” His conclusion, as seen in Romans 12:1-2, was that we all need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God as our reasonable act of service and devotion to Him, and to be transformed by the daily renewing of our minds. Knowing the weakness of his own body and, at times, the outworking of the tendencies of his mind, you can sense he knew that he, like all of us, needed to put on the whole armour of God in order to combat the enemy of our souls.

We were created with the desperate need for God’s strength in our lives. Imagine a small child trying to move something like an armchair in order to pick up something that has fallen beneath it. The chair will not move, simply because the child does not have the necessary strength to do what has to be done in order to do what needs to be accomplished. He cries in frustration and maybe even anger that he cannot lift the weight of the furniture. Then along comes the child’s father and, seeing the child’s tears and lack of natural strength, easily lifts the object out of the way. Not knowing it was daddy’s intervention and daddy’s strength that did what was needed, the child exclaims, “Look Daddy, I’ve done it!! I’ve done it!!” His daddy may smile and say nothing, but he knows it was his strength and power that accomplished the task – even if the child congratulates himself on his success. How often we are like that child, wrongly assuming we are stronger than we really are.

One of the toughest lessons it appears many of us have to learn – painful as it can be - is that the Lord allows us to fall flat on our faces time and time again. In that process, we have more than an occasional view of our weakness and inadequacies – until we come to accept that we are just like that little child, desperately in need of His indwelling presence in order to simply survive, let alone thrive. As the line of the old hymn goes, “I am

weak, but Thou art strong.” And yet it takes most of us a lifetime of learning that we continually need, as a child of God, to call out, “Abba, Father God, help me!! I cannot do this without You!!” This is all part of the preparation process that God does and which He allows in our lives.

SUMMARY

1. We MUST be born again in order to pass from death to life – and to enter into a personal relationship with God, through His Son, Jesus Christ.
2. We MUST recognise our own weakness and desperate need of God’s mercy and grace to make it through the challenges that this natural life will throw at us.
3. We MUST make a deliberate and daily choice to put on the whole armour of God in order to be equipped to stand in the day of battle, when our enemy, the devil, comes against us and against the Word of God within us.

QUESTIONS

1. Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ and in His substitutionary death on the cross to take away your sin and bring you into a personal and eternal relationship with your Heavenly Father? If not, will you take that step today – and ask God to cleanse you and make you anew?
2. Have you seen and come to terms with the fact that, as described in scripture, you are, of yourself, weak and helpless and in need of His abiding presence within you just to make it through the day?
3. Do you take on the whole armour of God each and every day so that you can stand against the enemy of your soul? If not, what steps are you going to take to do this on a daily basis?

Chapter 3

PEACE

Do not fear – We are commanded many times in scripture to “fear not”, to “let not our hearts be trouble,” to not be anxious for anything.

Many years ago, there was a well-known saying which went “Feel the fear and do it anyway.” It was built upon the fact of life that we all have times when we feel fear. Sometimes it is because of a natural, physical occurrence, or even something that could be described as a healthy response to something that has happened. For instance, if you are walking alone along a dark and deserted road at night time – and someone suddenly jumps, or even simply steps out from a gateway right in front of us, it would be a normal response to have a rush of adrenaline – producing a “fight or flight” reaction within us. When we were children, I am sure all of our parents taught us that fire burns. That “fear” they instilled in us was a deliberate attempt to produce a healthy aversion to touching the hot iron, the pan on the hot stove or the kettle just after it has been boiled.

We could conclude then that, in the natural realm, it is literally “only natural” to fear things that are bigger and stronger than us, that are hard or impossible for us to handle by ourselves and beyond our ability to control. Every one of us wants to be able to control the things that happen in our lives, and it is said that one of the main causes of stress is when someone else dominates and imposes their control over an area of our life that we want to be in control of. Whenever that dominance becomes excessive and overbearing, we can so easily become stressed – and at its extreme that feeling can turn to fear; fear that we will be forced to do something which we do not wish to do. And fear, it could be said, is the opposite of peace.

Our God, Jehovah, is Almighty (ALL-mighty); He is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent. He is the creator and source of everything that exists, has ever existed and ever will exist. He is GOD and, as God, He is seated upon His throne and reigns sovereign over all things. Nothing happens that is beyond His foreknowledge and His control. Nothing disturbs His “peace of mind”, His “equilibrium” and His composure. He is unruffled and unmoved at the antics and schemes of the devil, let alone all those of the human race – who think they can and will thwart His plans and purposes. In fact, Psalm 2:1-4 says, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision." Almighty God laughs at man's attempts to shake Him from His throne!

Scripture uses the term “the peace of God” – which seems to be a clear indication that the peace we are talking about is actually HIS, personal peace, the peace and serenity which He, Himself enjoys and which is His normal “state of mind.” That same peace is what He gifts to you and to me. What an amazing truth is hidden in that phrase. God gives us His own peace, the peace He feels, enjoys and has throughout all eternity. And if it's good enough for God Himself, just imagine what that state of peace will do to our human hearts and minds.

Bear this truth in mind as you read the following few scriptures:

Philippians 4:7 “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Isaiah 26:3 “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.”

Isaiah 30:15 “Only in returning to Me and waiting for Me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence will be your strength.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.”

That last passage from Proverbs gives us just a glimpse of the benefits of trusting in God and relying upon His direction and inner peace which, on occasions, may appear to be despite our personal understanding and inability to comprehend what is happening.

We all know there are times when the Lord instructs us to do something, to speak to someone, to go to a specific place or take a particular plan of action that would normally be contrary to our natural, built-in make up or personality type. That may instinctively produce a deep sense of nervousness within us and, in order to do it, we have to choose to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit, His inner voice and instruction – even though that may be uncomfortable to our natural disposition. Let’s take, for example, some “way-out” action Jesus instructed someone to do during His physical time of ministry in the land of Israel.

You will remember the occasion, recorded in Matthew 14, when the disciples got into a boat, intending to set sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, leaving Jesus behind on the shore. During the next hour or two a great storm arose on the sea and, in the midst of that, Jesus came along, walking on the water, as if He was going to walk straight passed them – like it was a race or something!! When the disciples saw the figure of a man on the water, they thought it was a spirit, a ghost, and cried out in fear. At hearing that, Jesus said “Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid.” Peter decides, and, says, “Well, if it is you Jesus, tell me to come – and I’ll come and walk on the water to you.” What was Jesus to do? After all, it was Him, so He couldn’t say, “It’s not me; don’t come!” or, worse still, “It is me – but still don’t come!” So, Jesus said “Come” – and out of the boat,

Peter stepped! Now, many Christians criticize Peter because he began to sink into the water – but remember, as Matthew tells us, Peter actually started to walk towards Jesus - on the water. It was only when he looked down and saw the waves and thought to himself, “I can’t do this, I may drown,” that he then began to sink. Jesus literally “gave him a hand”, rescued him, and later challenged him as to why he had doubted. But let’s recognise Peter overcame, or even ignored, the natural, common sense approach, that he wasn’t, naturally speaking, capable of walking on water and, because Jesus told him to, although he probably “felt the fear”, he “did it anyway.” I’ve been on the sea of Galilee, in a boat mind you, and each time I’ve done so, I’ve chosen to ignore any foolhardy thoughts about stepping over the side! But Peter didn’t; he stepped out and walked on top of the waves.

However, just because he did then what no one else except Jesus had ever done, walked on water, do you think he never felt fear ever again for the rest of his life? Of course not. There were many occasions, some of them even recorded in scripture, when he was in fear. For instance, when Jesus was being questioned by Pilate and a young girl accused him of being a one of His disciples, he denied he even knew Jesus at all. And he, like the rest of the disciples, were hiding away, locked in a room, “for fear of the Jews.” (John 20:19). Nevertheless, on the Day of Pentecost, that same Peter overcame the fear of those same Jews, stood up and preached the Gospel message in front of so many people, that 3000 of them gladly received his words and were “added to their number”, becoming followers of Jesus.

While, as John Ortberg has said, “Fear is the number one reason human beings are tempted to avoid doing what God asks them to do,” Peter learned to step out in confidence, obeying the commands, the call and the commission of the Lord upon his life – and so grew in his confidence towards God.

God's peace counteracts fear

What we are considering in this book is the unhealthy impact of an illogical fear, a fear of something that need not be feared, as well as fear which rises from receiving and believing information that contradicts the Word of God. This fear can so easily have a paralysing effect upon us, and yet, through God's enabling grace and abiding presence, we can overcome its impact upon our lives. That is why scripture is literally packed with advice, encouragement, instruction and commands on how we can overcome the fear that so often attacks our hearts and minds.

The indwelling peace of God is the normal state of a man or woman's heart – and any disturbance of the peaceful position of resting and abiding in the assurance of His love and protection is descending into and settling for an inferior existence.

Let us say here that fear is not necessarily the absence of faith, nor the sole presence of doubt. In fact, it is possible to have what we could describe as surges of both doubt and uncertainty at the same time as having faith. That is when we have to choose which we will allow to win the battle within us. Isaiah 53:1 begins with "Who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" In other words, we could read that as "Which report are you going to believe? What the Lord says and has revealed to you, or the information you receive from another, much less reliable source?"

In Mark 10 we read that a man brought his son who, as we would say today, was suffering from fits and convulsions, to the disciples, asking them to deliver him from a dumb spirit – but they were unable to do so. On seeing the father's anguish, Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes." The father cried out "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief." It was as if the father recognised within himself a battle between his faith and his doubt, or unbelief, possibly because of the number of times he had seen the natural "evidence" of the

son's condition with his own eyes, and knowing the number of times they had failed to get victory over the problem.

Similarly, there appear to be occasions when Jesus may well have been speaking into situations where others had those same types of inner conflicts. For instance, we see recorded in Mark 5:36 and Luke 8:50, Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came to Jesus, effectively begging Him to heal his 12-year-old daughter. While on the way to his home, news came that the girl had died, to which Jesus responded, telling Jairus, "Fear not, *believe ONLY*, and she shall be made whole." It is as if Jesus was aware that the verbal information Jairus was hearing, that his daughter was now dead, coupled with what He knew Jairus would see with his natural eyes when they arrived at his home, would highly likely squash the very faith that had prompted him to come to seek out Jesus in the first place. Hence, He effectively told him to swing away from the natural tendency to fear – and to believe *ONLY*.

Shortly before Jesus was crucified and knowing the time was short, He took every opportunity to give what can only be described as final instructions and heart-felt encouragement to His disciples, equipping them for all that which was about to happen, and preparing them for the monumental task that they would face in taking the Gospel to the world once He had ascended into Heaven.

In John 14:1, Jesus begins to encourage His disciples by saying "**LET** NOT your heart be troubled..." What was about to happen: His arrest, His betrayal, the scourging, the crucifixion, His burial, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven - and then their time of tarrying in Jerusalem (until they were endued with power from on high – to enable them to face the future), would surely test their faith that all this was "going to be alright in the end." So, He begins by saying "LET NOT..." In other words, He was saying they had a choice to "LET" or to "NOT LET" their heart be troubled. It was something they could impact by a choice which they, personally

and individually, could make. Although the disciples did not always pick up on and recognise the warnings that Jesus gave them about things that were about to happen, when they did come to pass, they remembered and were reassured, knowing that at least, if Jesus knew these things were on the horizon and that He was not shocked, nor the throne of Heaven rocked, when they came to pass, all would be well. That must have been such a reassurance to them – even though they still had to walk through the situations in real time.

LET THE PEACE OF GOD RULE – ACT AS AN UMPIRE

Colossians 3:15 (Amplified Bible), says “And let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts [deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds, in that peaceful state] to which as [members of Christ’s] one body you were also called [to live].”

We are all accustomed to watching sports matches and competitions, be it soccer, rugby, cricket, baseball, tennis or a myriad of others, and are familiar with the role of referees or umpires. In practice, while the unfortunate referee often takes the brunt of the abuse thrown their way, both fans and players have to learn that, in finality, “the referee’s decision is final.” Like it or not, once the referee has made a ruling over a goal, an offside, a run-out, the ball being out of play, etc., no amount of remonstrating with them is going to get them to change their mind in the opposite direction to what they have already decided.

“The peace of God, which passes all understanding WILL keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” is a sure and steadfast promise we have from the Word of God. (Philippians 4:7). The Lord Jesus has given us HIS OWN peace, (John 14:27), that deep sense of peace that lives within us and is able to keep our hearts, minds and emotions settled and stable – providing we allow it to. A deep, unruffled, steady and reassuring sense of

peace will never fail to be an internal spirit level, something that we can totally rely upon to reassure us when things are alright, in-order, and in line with God's sovereign will and plan. However, a sense that that peace is absent, ruffled, uneasy or disturbed is given to warn us when things are not as they should be, that something is not right, is out-of-order and not in line with what He wills and plans.

That sense of peace, or absence of it, if we train our hearts to be sensitive to its fluctuations, can be relied upon to guide us in the decisions we make throughout our lives. A deep sense of God's peace, even when everything around may be in turmoil, can act as an arbiter, a referee or an umpire – and an awareness of that abiding peace, even while we are navigating our way through the crises of life, can be relied upon to indicate that “all is well” when it may appear not to be. Indeed, in Psalm 23:4, David, the former shepherd boy, says that even “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” Why? Because “You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” In other words, even though the sheep may be walking through the valley where its very life could be under threat, it does not need to fear evil, because God's presence is with it, to accompany, protect, defend and guide it.

If we nurture and allow that sense of peace to grow and develop within us – and train ourselves to watch out for any changes to its “equilibrium”, it will act as a reliable umpire or referee, who makes a ruling in line with the will of God. And, because that referee's decision is totally reliable and unchanging, its presence or absence in our hearts can be relied upon as we make every decision we need to make in life.

Peace with JOY

It is often said that happiness depends on what happens. If what happens is nice, comfortable, convenient and makes us feel good and unruffled - and does not challenge the status quo in our lives, then the chances are

we will FEEL happy. If on the other hand, things happen that are not nice, are uncomfortable, inconvenient and, therefore, don't make us feel good, we may FEEL unhappy.

But the peace of God is a GIFT from God and is, in fact, a fruit of His Spirit within us, that grows as we nurture and develop our awareness of and respect for it. As we grow more and more to appreciate that abiding peace of God within us, I believe the corresponding fruit of the Spirit, which is JOY, will also grow within our hearts and lives.

Galatians 5:22 *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.”*

Romans 15:13 *“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”*

Romans 14:17 *“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”*

There will be deep sense of joy and peace which flows from believing HE has everything under His control, that He is ruling over all – and will not allow anything to happen to us, or come into our lives that is beyond His control, and is fitting into His eternal plan – and that He can and will work it all together for our good. (See Roman 8:28, Amplified Version). Even if and when the enemy sends things our way which he intends to harm us, God is able to turn them around to be for good in our lives. Someone once said that even if horse or cattle manure is thrown at us – God can and will plough it into the ground beneath our feet, like compost or fertiliser, which will only help us grow more into His image and likeness!

Putting the Presence of the Peace into Practice

(There's a tongue-twister for you to get your head around!!)

OK, so how do we put all of this into practice? The first thing we need to recognise is that the peace of God is a reliable indicator within our hearts

and minds which, as we become accustomed to sensing and having an awareness of its presence, we can go forward with confidence, taking a particular course of action. Similarly, if we are sensitive enough to register the absence of that calmness and assurance, we will be enabled to take a different course of action. This ability, which God has given us, can literally be a lifesaver; it can save us from much turmoil and many heartaches and equip us to live our lives in harmony with the plans and purposes of God for us.

The Word of God is given us to guide, to equip and to make us grow into the image and likeness of Christ, and yet it does not give us specific instruction and guidance on things like who we should marry, which house to buy, which career path to take or which particular job to apply for. There certainly are, of course, principles through which the Word of God will give us general guidance, such as not being unequally yoked together with unbelievers, that God has not and will not call us to take up a career as a burglar or bank robber, etc. Recognising your deep rooted gift and talents may guide you towards making the correct choice of career paths – be it an accountant or a primary school teacher – but as to which company or school you should work at is something you will be more likely to recognise by the awareness or absence of a sense of peace within you while you are considering the option of choosing company or school A, B or C.

Similarly, life is filled with some major hurdles we have to negotiate. Maybe, at times, life could be more accurately described as a 5000-metre steeplechase rather than a 100-metre sprint. We need the constant assurance that, as we approach each obstacle, our coach has trained us to be aware of the hazards and the best way of overcoming them. The awareness of His presence and His peace within us gives us confidence, even though we may have doubts in our own ability. Knowing His presence and peace within us is like having Jesus Himself running alongside us, rather than even standing at the side of the race track,

personally cheering us on, shouting “Come on, you can do it”, when we may doubt our own ability to even complete the race, let alone win the prize.

SPOILER ALERT: Relax. Because God is on our side, in the end, WE WIN!!

SUMMARY

1. Jesus has given us His peace like an internal spirit level within our hearts, to guide us as to which path and what action to take.
2. He has promised His peace will keep our hearts and minds stable and secure even when our natural senses may say the opposite.
3. Peace and joy are fruits of the Spirit and are, therefore, an evidence of the life of the Spirit of God within us.

QUESTIONS

1. Are you sensitive to recognise both the presence and the absence of the peace of God in your heart?
2. What steps can you take to train your heart to be more sensitive to the presence or absence of that peace?
3. Are you aware that sometimes things happen in the natural realm, which may seem contrary to the deep sense of peace that you still have in your heart, and have you trained yourself to allow His peace to triumph in the ensuing debate which that often produces?

Chapter 4

PROVISION

It is said that mankind is created with a number of needs that they will do their utmost to fulfil. Several of these could be described more as emotional rather than physical needs, even if the need for both may be manifested or expressed in the physical realm. The first, emotional needs, include things like love, acceptance, adventure and excitement, whereas things like health and provision – which includes money, food, clothing, a roof over our head, etc., could well be described more as physical needs.

Because we need excitement and adventure we may be driven to participate in all sorts of sports and pastimes which give us an adrenaline rush, like skydiving, parachuting/hang-gliding, motor car racing, going on some of the hair-raising rides we see more and more featuring at theme parks all over the world.

The need we all have for love and acceptance will drive some people to do the most incredible things to win the approval, admiration, acceptance and the heart and love of someone we admire and desire to have a meaningful relationship with.

In addition to these cravings within each of us, in many respects, an additional list of things which we all think we need and, therefore, strive for, could be summed up in three simple words: Popularity, Position and Provision.

Sometimes those desires may cause us to do some even crazier and reckless things than the desire for excitement and adventure can do. It has been said that there are just three areas in which the devil attacks and tempts us and, in fact, those same issues were the areas in which he tempted Jesus following his 40 day fast in the wilderness.

Popularity, Position and Provision

Throughout history, and certainly in the 20th and 21st century, we have seen the demise of many well-known politicians and even preachers who have been tempted and fallen in these three areas, although, in modern times, perhaps these could may be more easily identified as Girl/Guys, Glory and Gold. Having said that, Satan has really not changed his tactics that much over millennia. Just consider the areas in which he tempted Jesus in the wilderness:

1. Would Jesus bow down and worship the devil – then all the lands He could see and the people within them would be His – and He would be the ruler over them? (POSITION)
2. Would Jesus turn the stones into bread – proving He had the ability to provide for His own physical needs for the rest of His life? (PROVISION)
3. Would Jesus throw Himself off the pinnacle of the temple – where He would be seen by the crowds who, seeing this, would bow down, worship and honour Him? (POPULARITY)

But Jesus refused to sink to fulfilling those needs by operating in the physical and natural realm, seeking to attain those things through His own natural effort and works, instead of in the Spirit realm. He knew that 1. man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God (dwelling upon and living in the spiritual and heavenly realm – not upon the physical, worldly, earthly things of life), that 2. His Father was the only one worthy of being worshipped and served and that 3. as He was already omnipotent, He did not need the devil, of all ‘people’, to tempt Him to try to achieve His calling and mission by performing stunts. And, in the same way we are told to arm ourselves with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, Jesus overcame him by using the Word of God as a sword to cut His way through the devil’s lies and deceit.

Let us consider some of the scriptures we too can rely upon to defeat the enemy of our souls.

It has been said that for every need we may have now or ever, there is a promise in the Word of God upon which we can stand as part of God's unbreakable covenant with and commitment to us. He has, through His spoken and written Word committed Himself to perform and provide certain things – providing we fulfil any conditions He has laid down to be fulfilled before making a claim upon what He has promised.

Romans 10:14 tells us “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”

We could take that as a clear indication that we need to hear and know what the Word of God says in order to put our faith in both it and in the author of it – and stand upon God's commitment and covenant to fulfil His promise, as declared in His Word. So, how can we stand upon the promises in the Word of God unless we have read, know and believed them? Let us look at some of those promises with regard to the issue of the provision we so desperately need and seek after.

Matthew 6:33 “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

In what we know as “The Sermon on the Mount”, Jesus taught His disciples that the first and foremost thing on their minds and hearts, what they should centre their attention upon and dedicate their time and energy to, should be the Kingdom of God. He taught them not to be constantly thinking about what they should eat, drink or wear. Even the birds of the air and the grass in the fields are fed and clothed, so how much more would His heavenly Father clothe and feed each of us, His children? Therefore, they were to take no thought for those natural things

of life, but to seek first and foremost the Kingdom of God and the growth and expansion of it in our lives and upon the earth. Then, while we are busy being occupied in doing that, all those important, but almost coincidental things of life, will be taken care of by our Heavenly Father.

It is so easy for us to be side-tracked into spending all of our time worrying about and seeking after the things which God has promised to take care of. If only we would concentrate on His priorities rather than our own. Seek after the growth of God's Kingdom in our hearts and lives; seek after growing His Kingdom in every area in which we have or can influence. Truly, as Jesus taught His disciples to pray, we should have a heart that daily says, "Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven." As we press on to allow the King of Kings and His Kingdom to reside and rule in our hearts, He will take care of all the things we need.

In the same passage of scripture, we are told that none of us is capable of adding a cubit (let's just say an inch or a centimetre) to our height, so we are asked the rhetorical question, 'why would we spend our time and effort worrying about something we cannot influence one way or another?' Instead, the Bible tells us clearly to get our priorities in order and, in return, God will supply all we need to live, function and bring both fruit and glory to His name.

Psalm 34:10 "The young lions lack and suffer hunger; **But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.**"

Here we have an Old Testament promise which links so well with our previous Sermon on the Mount promise, that if we "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, all these things will be added..." unto us. A baby boy or girl would starve and die if it were not fed and nurtured by its loving parents, who care for its every need, feed, water, clean and pamper it for many years - until the child is grown and understands and learns how to take care of itself. The Lord could easily

have used this as an illustration here, but He chose to use a young lion as an example instead. Why? Perhaps because although in a similar way to baby boys and girls, young lions are not born ready and able to fend for themselves, so they do not automatically know how to hunt, trap and devour their prey, they have to be taught the rudiments of how to live and survive in the jungle. The lion may be called the king of the jungle, but the young lions would starve if they were thrust straight out of their parents' lair to fend for themselves. They have to be trained to do what needs to be done in order for them to survive. While they may have all the necessary physical ability to do all these things, until they know how to do what needs to be done in order for them to survive, they may, at times, go for days without eating till they get it right. Their parents will show them how it's done, then leave them to get on with it – and if they don't get it right, they go hungry. In our case, as His children, the Lord wants us to seek after and rely totally upon Him for our every need. As we seek Him with all our hearts, He will ensure we lack nothing that we need to not only survive, but thrive - through His mercy and grace – not by our own might, works or scheming.

Psalm 23:1 “The LORD is my shepherd; **I shall not want.**”

Remember that King David was chosen – as a man after God's own heart – while he was still a shepherd boy. The prophet Samuel was sent by God to his father, Jesse's house, to anoint King Saul's successor as king of Israel. Jesse brought before Samuel all of David's older brothers – but none of them fitted “the bill”, as the person God knew would be the ideal candidate to fulfil that role. In the end they had to call the one remaining son, whom they had obviously overlooked - as he was out in the fields looking after his father's sheep. Throughout his life David tended to view things from a shepherd and sheep's point of view. (Consider that concept next time you read about his life and the Psalms he wrote).

David saw the Lord as his shepherd, protector, guardian and the person who took responsibility for him as well as exercise authority over him. He knew and experienced the leading of God as his shepherd, the one who wielded both a rod and a staff – to protect, guide and lead him all the days of his life, through dark and deadly valleys, in green pastures, by still waters, in the ways of righteousness. He knew Him as the One who anointed his head with oil, restored his soul, who honoured and raised him up in front of his enemies, who ensured goodness and mercy were always at hand to bless him - and who guaranteed his place at His side in His own home in Heaven.

Having those promises in mind, David begins Psalm 23 with the confident declaration “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Considering a number of other translations or editions of that same verse may also be helpful: “I will have everything I need.” “He gives me everything I need.” “I will never be in need.” “I lack nothing.” “...there is nothing I lack.” And, finally, how about, “...to feed, to guide and to shield me, I shall not want”?

The wonderful truth is that while sheep can be the most foolish of animals, easily distracted and soon distanced from the flock to which they belong, if they stay put – with the flock and under the protection and watchful eye of the shepherd, they will flourish and grow. While ever they “abide” – they will, indeed, flourish and grow. Just like we will if, as expressed in John 15, we abide in the vine; producing fruit. His life will flow to and through us – and we will produce fruit to the glory of God, our Father.

Psalm 84:11 “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; **No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.**”

We walk by faith; we stand by grace and because of His mercy and longsuffering towards us, because we cannot and do not stand in our own

righteousness. We have no righteousness of our own. In fact, all our own righteousness is (still) as filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6). But if we come humbly before Him, acknowledging our weakness and desperate need for His grace and mercy towards us, accepting Jesus's substitutionary death for us on the cross of Calvary, we can stand in HIS righteousness, having HIS holiness imputed to us (paid into our Heavenly "bank account"). As we do that, the Lord Jesus Himself stands as our intercessor and advocate before His Heavenly Father, shielding us from the consequences of our sin and stupidity. On the basis of all that Jesus has done, God grants us His pardoning grace which, as has been said before, could be described as ***God's Riches At Christ's Expense***. As a result of all Jesus has done, God grants each of us, as His children, all we need to walk and live victoriously for Him. No good thing will He withhold from those who walk in Jesus's uprightness, His righteousness, because now He looks no longer at me and what I have done but at Jesus and what He has done on my behalf.

Luke 12:22-30 "Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things."

Matthew 10:29-31 "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs

of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

Our desire and need for provision can cause us to do some incredibly crazy and even stupid things. We can work eighteen-hour days, seven days a week, with seldom, if ever, a break or a holiday, we can put in so much effort “building our barns”, like the foolish man Jesus speaks of in Luke 12:18, and end up dying before we ever have chance to slow down long enough to enjoy any of the fruit of our labour. It has, of course, been said that nobody on their death bed has ever been heard to say they wish they’d spent more time at the office. And yet we can so easily be caught in the hamster wheel of life, going round and round and never being able, or having the courage to say, “STOP, I want to get off!”

Having said this, I will be bold enough to say that I don’t think anyone ever sets out to become a workaholic – the same as nobody ever sets out to become an alcoholic or drug addict. It is something that happens when we become so obsessed with continuing in the routine of “that’s what I do, because that’s just what I do. And it needs doing, so because of that, I need to do it.”

We can very easily though become accustomed to a certain standard of living, that we feel we have to continue to maintain that level of income. We can also so easily find ourselves living to fulfil other people’s expectations of us and of a particular level of output that the kudos and the feeling of pleasure, acceptance and approval only fuels the drive within us to keep up that level of pressure. And yet we see from these scriptures that God has committed Himself to supply and provide for us, in the same way, only much more so, than how He provides for the birds of the air. If we only believed what He says and has committed Himself to do, we would immediately be relieved of 99% of the pressure we feel under.

Imagine blowing a balloon up to, and seemingly beyond its maximum capacity and expandability. It's ready to explode in our faces with a loud BANG!!, shocking and making everyone jump. Everyone can see it's about to happen – and yet everyone is surprised, and jumps when it happens. Once it has burst though, the balloon is useless, beyond repair, and will simply be discarded. If we explode because we have taken on board more than we were built to take – those around us, who have come to expect us to keep taking on more and more, can and will so easily discard us, just like that balloon.

Jesus uses the example of birds on a number of occasions, pointing out that while we may all have seen them practicing the old adage of the early bird catching the worm, none of us have ever seen them sweating and toiling, collapsing under the strain of it all. God cares for them and ensures they are provided for; He even notices when one of them falls to the ground. Jesus tells us very clearly that we are of far more value than that to His Father. He knows us so well that not only does He know the number of hairs on our head, He knows every single one of them. If one falls out – He knows if that one is number 82,356 or number 52,567!!

OK, that's just my opinion – as a bald man in his 60's!! But, having said that, research has shown that on average, people have between 80,000 and 100,000 hairs on their head. (Apparently, blondes have around 150,000, brown-haired people 110,000, black-haired people 100,000 and redheads 90,000!! So, I guess as the average is 80,000, that accounts for us baldies!!). And God knows you well enough to know the exact number on your head! If He knows each of us that well, surely He knows and cares about the more important issues of our life, like the fact we need to eat, be clothed and have a roof over our heads – be it bald or hairy!!

1 Timothy 6:6-8 “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.”

Before we look at these verses, let us consider that they flow straight on from 1 Timothy 6:3-5, which speak about men who think they can use godliness to gain “stuff” in the natural realm. Paul, in his first letter to his protégé, Timothy, goes on to encourage both him and us to withdraw from such people and, instead, to press towards a life of Godliness – or God-like-ness - with contentment. That, he adds, is of a great and lasting benefit, rather than for something we can strive for but will, ultimately, leave behind when this earthly life is over. As the saying goes, “no one ever saw a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer”!! Instead we are encouraged to be content if we have food in our stomachs and clothes on our back. As an aside, incidentally, we are not even encouraged to strive after a roof over our heads. Why? Perhaps because, as Jesus Himself said, while the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, He, “the Son of Man, has nowhere to lay His head.” And the servant is not above his Master. (Matthew 10:24).

Proverbs 4:20-22 “My son, attend to My words; incline thine ear unto My sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. **For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.**”

Isaiah 53:5 “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And **by His stripes we are healed.**”

Here, as well as in many other places in God’s Word, we have His clear promise of health and strength for our natural bodies. The Lord Himself, through the writer of the book of Proverbs, exhorts us to devour the Word of God, to keep His Word before our natural, as well as our spiritual eyes, to store them up in our hearts because, as we say in 21st century terms, “we are what we eat.” As the Word of God tells us in Colossians 3:16, we are to “Let the word of Christ dwell in (us) richly,” and, as we do so, that Word will transform our minds, our perspectives and our lives.

But, as we stand upon the promises within God's Word, we will be empowered to appropriate what He has promised, outworking what He has committed to provide for our physical as well as spiritual life. Isaiah 53:5 is a clear commitment from our heavenly Father that physical healing, as well as spiritual healing and restoration, was included in the suffering and the death of His Son on the cross.

In the United Kingdom, our bank notes carry a what is known as a promise made by the Bank of England. On, for instance, a £10 note, it simply says, "I promise to pay the bearer upon demand, the sum of ten pounds." We accept that promise from the bank that if we go into a shop to buy something valued at £10, the shopkeeper will give it to us in exchange for the £10 note. He will then deposit that £10 in his local bank – and that bank will add the figure of £10 to his account. And yet it is only a piece of paper. But if you or I took a similar sized piece of scrap paper into a shop, even if we had written £10 clearly on it, the shopkeeper would refuse to accept it in exchange for £10 worth of goods, and, similarly his bank would refuse to accept it – and to add £10 to his account. Why? Because the difference between the two pieces of paper is one carries the promise of the person who has the power and the authority to make such a commitment – and can be relied upon to fulfil the promise they made. The other carries no authority and is therefore worthless. We have God's commitment that all He has promised and committed Himself to provide will be fulfilled if we make a claim against a promise given in His Word. As we see in 2 Corinthians 1:20, a covenant promise is enshrined in the commitment He has given us in His Word. "For all the promises of God in Him are YES, and in Him, Amen, to the glory of God by us."

Philippians 4:19 "But my **GOD shall supply all your** need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

You may have seen job adverts along these lines: "(Job Title) wanted, followed by the job description, followed by the salary and an 'on target

earnings' figure." You may have, on occasions, also seen the something like this phrase, "All reasonable expenses will be covered." That's a little like God's promise to us. If we do what He commands us to do – all our reasonable living expenses, all we need in order for us to accomplish what He has commissioned us to do – will be provided - providing we do all this in order to bring praise and glory to His name.

It is also wise to check out what the Philippians had done in advance of the apostle Paul passing on this promise and commitment from God to them. You will find in the few verses preceding this promise in verse 19, that Paul thanks them for the way that they had poured out financially into his ministry, even when no other church was, in modern day terms, prepared to sponsor his ministry, his travels and his very necessities. He tells them their gifts were a sweet-smelling savour, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. I do not think it any coincidence then that he then goes on immediately to tell them that God will (now) supply all of their needs according to His riches in glory – by Christ Jesus. The promise of continuing and continual supply was specifically made to people who had made a choice not to be a bottleneck, holding onto whatever they could get their hands on but, instead, choose to be funnels, through which God could pour His blessings, knowing that they would minister it out to others, rather than hoard it for themselves.

Luke 12:32 "Do not fear, little flock, for it is **your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**"

This verse reminds us of a custom a number of countries and language groups have. In Spanish or Portuguese speaking countries, if someone says (the equivalent of) "thank you," the response they would get from the person they thanked would be "de nada", or, in other words, "it was nothing." In England the reply would usually be "You are welcome" or, "It's my pleasure." It's an expression used to show that the giver is pleased to see the recipient is grateful for and appreciative of what the

person giving the object, compliment or even gesture, has given. The verse “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom,” just shows us how pleased God is that we appreciate what He has done and provided for us. We could say “God gets a ‘buzz’ out of blessing us.” Hence, He says, “It’s My pleasure!”

Just throwing in one final example – at no extra cost!!

Isaiah 54:13 “All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.”

I learned a couple of things from this scripture when our children were young.

1. When one of our children was young, his teacher appeared to have got the impression that he was very casual about his education and that he was more interested in being an entertainer and a performer than learning. As much as I was tempted to, rather than becoming confrontational and getting angry at the teacher, I took that verse, and chose to believe that God would ensure our children would be properly educated, as HE was ultimately responsible for their education. They would be “taught of the Lord.” That child grew up to be a teacher himself AND has also conducted an orchestra on several occasions as well as having performed as an accomplished musician on numerous occasions in front of crowds of multiple thousands of people all over the world.
2. When, on occasions, our children appeared to be getting bullied at school, rather than teaching them to react with strife and to physically fight back, my wife and I took the decision that somehow God would not only bring peace into the situation – but that they would also have peace in their hearts as they navigated this “dodgy” predicament without resorting to physical violence. And God somehow brought about a peaceful resolution on every occasion.

What Would Jesus Do?

In closing, as previously mentioned, for every need we may have now or, indeed, ever, there is a promise in the Word of God which we can stand upon. But of course, we cannot quote what we do not know and we cannot use a weapon which we do not pick up and arm ourselves with. If we are to stand against the devil who comes only to steal from, to kill and to destroy us, in the same way and with the same results that Jesus got, we are going to have to do what Jesus did. That is, to take up and use the Word of God to get the victorious results we need.

SUMMARY

1. There are things in life which we genuinely need as well as things we simply want or would like to have.
2. An unhealthy craving to acquire those things by any and all means only opens up the possibility of being tempted to do anything and everything we can to fulfil those desires.
3. God has promised us that He will supply all we need in order to live the life He has called us to live victoriously.

QUESTIONS

1. Have you identified areas of weakness within your heart and life which allows you to monitor any unhealthy craving towards fulfilling these desires in your own strength rather than receiving them as being supplied by God's grace?
2. Do you fill your heart and mind with the promises of God in His Word – so that you can make claim to these through faith in Him?
3. In what areas of your life have you defeated those unhealthy cravings within you and won victory – so that in future you can defeat the attacks of the enemy by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony?

Chapter 5

PROTECTION

As Christians we know there are times when it seems that all hell is literally fighting against us. And, of course, in many ways, it is. The Bible tells us clearly that the devil, the enemy of our souls, goes around “like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8). He seeks only to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). And yet it can, on occasions, be very easy to for us give the impression to non-Christians that we always sail through life, floating on lovely white clouds, strumming our harps, living a perfectly peaceful life with no conflict, temptation, pressure, doubt, failure and, dare I say it..., never falling into sin. And, before we move on, let’s remember that 1 John 1:8 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,” and verse 9 continues, “ If we confess our sins (which obviously assumes that we have sinned), He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Add to this that in John 8:7, when the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman, who had been caught in the act of adultery, to Jesus, He responded “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.” And, of course, no one present – apart from Jesus Himself - was qualified; and He added that neither would He condemn her.

It appears that the opinion that many non-Christian or unchurched people have of us is that we try to give the impression that we live perfect, sinless lives, while they can see our faults and failures as they are all too evident to them. Perhaps we also have fallen into the trap of believing that lie ourselves. So, when we do face the same negative things which come against us as they do them, it’s only too easy to hide the fact we are facing challenges that are too big for us - without the mercy and grace of God to carry us through the storms of life.

It's time to get real – and let people know we are only surviving the storms because of Jesus. In James 4:7 we are told to submit ourselves to God – and THEN to resist the devil. It is only THEN that he will flee from us. Why my emphasis on the word THEN? Because we are first and foremost instructed to submit our lives, plans, hopes, dreams, our thoughts, intents, ambitions and, in fact, every area of our lives, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. THEN He, Jesus, will stand up and fight on our behalf and in our defence. THEN, once we have submitted our lives totally to His Lordship over us, we will have the authority He gives us to stand up to and resist the enemy in the name of Jesus, with the full backing of His name and with His power and strength, to resist the enemy - and to watch him flee. We cannot survive the onslaught of the enemy in our own strength – without the might, power and authority of Jesus Christ fighting our battles for, with and through us.

It is only when we abide in Him – and He abides in us, as John 15 tells us, that His life flows through us. Choosing to live in Him and in His presence means we are, as Psalm 91:1 puts it, “dwelling in the secret place of the most-High.” When we are living connected to the vine, living in His presence and in submission to Him in every area of our lives, we will have access into the benefits of the rest of chapter 91 of the book of Psalms.

Psalm 91 “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my

refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; **THERE SHALL NO EVIL BEFALL THEE, NEITHER SHALL ANY PLAGUE COME NIGH THY DWELLING.** For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.”

While this Psalm is, obviously, a messianic prophecy about the promises Father God was speaking over His only begotten Son, it is nevertheless, a chapter full of promises and commitments God has made to each of His children, to all of those who dwell in the secret place of the most High.

Isaiah 43:2 "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

What an all-encompassing verse of scripture, which covers so many areas in which we need the protection of the Almighty to save and help us.

Isaiah 54:17 “No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn.”

As we have already seen, our enemy, the devil, is battling against us by any and all means he can. That’s why we are told, in Ephesians 6, to take on the whole armour of God so that that we can withstand and conquer the wiles of the devil. After tempting and fighting against us, Satan himself has the audacity to condemn us, and our own conscience and minds can so easily battle against us till we find ourselves falling under the

weight of self-condemnation. Those attacks can all too easily paralyse us through the feelings of guilt and inadequacy they stir up and which can take up residence within our hearts.

This scripture in Isaiah 54 shows us the way in which God has empowered us to defeat these attacks. Firstly, we need to take hold of the promise that NO weapon that has been designed to be used against us will prosper and prevail. We must stand on the promises of God, such as there being no condemnation to us – because we are in Christ Jesus and because our heart's desire is to walk not after the ways of the flesh but to walk in the spirit and in the ways the Holy Spirit of God leads and guides us.

Before considering more in depth the issue of tongues which rise against us in judgement, let me first say that there are obviously occasions when people may criticise us for being rude, unthoughtful, arrogant, even inept, lazy, or under-qualified for, or incapable of, performing a particular task or role. Those are things which need our serious consideration rather than automatically disregarding them out of hand.

Someone once said that the word condemn is the word we use when a building is no longer fit to be occupied, when it can be considered of no further use or consideration. It can be disregarded, left unoccupied or even demolished and taken away. So it is, when the devil, ourselves or others speak negative and untruthful words of condemnation over our lives. We can consider them of no use to us, not fit for consideration or dwelling upon. Instead we can choose to set our minds on what God says about us – because we are assured that He knows all things. 1 John 3:20 promises us that “...if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things,” and goes on to add “if our heart does not condemn us, then we have confidence towards God.”

We read in the book of Kings that the King of Syria sent an army to Dothan to capture the prophet Elisha, because he found out God was

telling Elisha things he was even saying in his bedroom and forewarning him of plans he was making against the children of Israel, before he was able to carry them out. The army surrounded the whole city with horses and chariots. Elisha's servant woke up early and saw the enemy and, knowing what was, naturally speaking, about to happen, said "Alas, my master, what shall we do?" Elisha, though, saw more with his spiritually opened eyes, his eyes of faith, than his servant could see with his natural eyesight.

2 Kings 6:16-17 "And he answered, 'Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.' And Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.' And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

While reading that passage quite rightly sounds dramatic, let me suggest something to put it in context... I recently sat in the village in which we live, where we are surrounded by hills, around two-miles from our house. I was daydreaming about this verse of scripture when a scene from the classic 1964 film "Zulu" came to mind. Towards the end of the film, after many intense battles, around 4000 warriors of the Zulu nation surrounded the 100 British soldiers who were defending Rorkes Drift, in full view of the British men. The soldiers immediately feared they were about to be slaughtered by the overwhelming numbers that they thought were about to make their final, decisive attack. In my imagination though, I saw those 4000 figures on the hill as being like the angels, on horses and chariots, who were encamped around the city of Dothan in defence of Elisha, and his worrisome servant. What an amazing concept to grasp that, as we are told in Psalm 34:7, "The angel of the Lord encamps around them that fear Him, and delivers them." In verse 3 of that same chapter, David says for us to "magnify the Lord with (him), and let us exalt His name together." To magnify something means to make it big or, more accurately, make it bigger in our eyes than we saw it previously. We cannot make God any

bigger than He is, but we can increase our perspective of Him in our own eyes and, at the same time, reduce our perspective of our enemy and what he throws at and brings against us.

Protect, Defend and Deliver

In the same way as we, as parents of children, young or grown up and mature, would protect and defend our children with our own lives and to our last breaths, even more so we need to understand that our Heavenly Father has committed Himself to protect and defend us as His children for all eternity. While we were yet sinners, He loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son to die for us, taking away the sin barrier, and death, the consequence and wages of that sin, away for ever. Romans 8:32 says that having done that, it is inconceivable that He would not “freely give us all things.” 1 Corinthians 2:12 adds that because we have received “the spirit which is of God, we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” Throughout the Psalms, King David calls upon God to defend and deliver him from his adversaries, from his enemies and even the torment within his own heart. Our Heavenly Father will protect and defend and deliver us, His children, from any and all the negative attacks and accusations that come against us so that we can stand victorious and free, without condemnation – as His blood-bought children.

SUMMARY

1. The devil seeks to steal, kill, destroy and devour. Jesus came to give us a more-abundant life – a life of victory, free from guilt and condemnation.
2. At times our own hearts will condemn us for our faults and failings, but God has forgiven us because of the atoning sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, releasing us forever from the curse of condemnation.
3. God will protect, defend and deliver us when we call upon His mercy and grace.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you “dwell in the secret place of the most-high”, in the conscious awareness of His presence?
2. Have you learned the difference between the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the condemnation of your own heart and that of the devil?
3. When was the last time you were aware that God was standing in your defence – teaching you to relax under His wings and enjoy His grace, even when your heart and mind seemed contrary to that place of confidence?

Chapter 6

PRESENCE

The classic book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence, is one which many Christians have read and studied in the hope that it will guide them into a closer walk with God and to have, develop, nurture and enjoy an enduring awareness of the presence of God. In the same way, as I and many others have said before, every man, woman, boy and girl is born with a God-shaped blank within their hearts which only He can fill, there is a similarly inbuilt need and desire within each of us to worship someone or something we honour as being worthy of such praise and glory. Some try to fill that God-shaped blank and position of worship and adoration with natural objects and/or people, whether it is themselves, a footballer, athlete, movie star, musician or popstar. It has been said that everyone worships their god, be it their own bodies, as they work out in the gym, the cars they wash and polish in the driveway, the sport they watch in person or on TV, or the Almighty God we worship through the way we live for Him, the things we do and say and how we spend our time and money. Whichever way you choose, choose you will – and do. That’s why, as we read in Joshua 24:15, Joshua challenged the people, saying, “ And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” And, because we all have a choice, we’re even given some advice as to the best way to make that choice. See Deuteronomy 30:19, where we are told, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you, life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose LIFE, that both you and your descendants may live.” That’s like having a multiple-choice exam question, followed by a choice of just two answers. Here’s the question, and you have a choice between A – LIFE, and B – DEATH. But in this case,

the exam questioner actually tells you, “Choose A - LIFE”. They tell you, “The correct answer is A – LIFE, so Choose A - LIFE.” And yet some will still get it wrong and choose B, the wrong answer.

We are told clearly that life is only found in Jesus; He is answer ‘A’, ‘Plan A’, ‘Life...’; so “CHOOSE A!!” And yet still some choose Plan B..., and the results that go with it..., because, with God, there is NO Plan B!!

So, we make a choice - to choose LIFE, to desire, to seek after, to pursue and be devoted to Him Whom we have chosen to make the Lord of our lives: Jesus. And we can have absolute confidence in knowing that if we desire Him and seek after Him, we will find Him.

Proverbs 8:17 “I love those who love Me, and those who seek Me diligently will find Me.”

and

Jeremiah 29:13 “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”

He has promised that He will be found by those who seek after Him with all of their hearts. And we are assured, because of the promises He has given us in His Word that He will never, ever, ever leave or forsake us when we have sought after Him and found Him. These are promises He has given as part of His everlasting covenant with us, His unchangeable Word to us. ALL of which He has confirmed by an oath – and “it is impossible for God to lie.” (Hebrews 6:18).

So, we can rest in His promises:

Luke 17:20-21 “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He (Jesus) answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

And, where there's a Kingdom, there is a KING, seated upon His throne. Therefore, the King is also resident within you.

Matthew 28:20 “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, ***I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.***”

Hebrews 13:5 “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, ***I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.***”

So, as we live, dwell, or “abide” as the Bible puts it, we know we can and will produce fruit in our lives to the glory of God. “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.” (John 15:4).

Not only then do we have the everlasting promise of His abiding presence with and in us, we can see the impact it made on some of the saints of old – and know that as He was with them, He will also be with us.

Right from the very beginning, in Genesis, we read that it was God's desire for relationship and fellowship with Adam and Eve. “God walked with in the garden in the cool of the day, and called to Adam ‘Where are you?’.” Just imagine that; walking in a garden, let alone the most beautiful, unsullied, perfect Garden of Eden, in the cool of the day – with the creator of the universe, almighty God. Without any irreverence or frivolity, I'm sure we could conclude that He just wanted to relax and stroll through the garden, ‘tiptoe through the tulips,’ walk arm in arm with the only two people in the universe, whom He had created to share life with. That is what sin ruined – causing all the havoc that we have seen ever since and which God has had to remedy through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, just so that we, and He, could live and walk together in the beauty of holiness for all eternity.

That's the level of importance God puts on us living in His presence.

“Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him.” Genesis 5:24. Enoch walked with God. They were so accustomed to walking together, talking and fellowshiping together that, as one preacher put it, Enoch just carried on walking – until he walked right into Heaven.

Elijah, the great prophet and man of God, on occasions became so depressed and dejected that he went off and hid in a cave, and then hid under a juniper tree. In some respects, the craziest thing was that he had his worse bout of depression and discouragement within just a day or two of having called fire down from Heaven to burn up the sacrifice, soaked in many, many gallons of water, then slaying several hundred false prophets of Baal. After allowing him to wallow in self-pity for a while, God came to visit, and twice asked, “What are you doing ‘here’ Elijah?” (See 1 Kings 19:9 & 13). Note, He didn’t shout down from Heaven with a loud voice, or send an angel on His behalf. He was there in person – and said “what are you doing HERE? not “What are you doing THERE?” Almighty God was with him under the juniper tree and hiding away, sulking in the cave. Dare I say that that reminds me a little of Job’s friends, who sat with him, in silence, for a full week, not saying one single word, just to stand in solidarity and wait till Job “pulled himself together”? It was only when Job, as it says in Job 3:1, “opened his mouth and cursed his day...,” that they joined in and bewailed his predicament with him. In Elijah’s case, God “let him stew” for a while first, and then effectively said, “OK, Elijah, what on earth are you doing here?”

Take heart from that; if God was with Elijah, even in his lowest moments, He is, and always will be, with you and with me, no matter how low you think you’ve fallen – or feel.

In Daniel 6 we read that King Nebuchadnezzar had the three Israelite young men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego thrown in the fiery furnace because they would not bow down and worship an idolatrous

image of him. After a while, after King Nebuchadnezzar had been sweating over what he had done to these men of God, they were found to still be alive, loosed from their bonds, untouched by the flames – and walking around inside the fiery furnace – with a fourth man, who was “like unto the SON OF GOD.” It’s interesting to note here that, in Jesus’s natural lifetime, the learned Jewish scholars, scribes and pharisees of His day did not recognise Him and were highly offended at the very thought of Him calling God His Father. And yet the pagan King of Babylon had recognised and acknowledged Him as that hundreds of years earlier.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This is recorded in what we term as and consider as the *OLD* Testament scriptures; the scriptures the Israelites knew and read before Jesus was even conceived and born in the physical realm, in the land of Israel 2000 years ago. But the scriptures say that the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, somehow recognised and acknowledged Him as being “like unto the SON OF GOD.”

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were in the fiery furnace; but Jesus, the Son of God, was there with them, JUST LIKE He has promised to be with you and me when things get hot and uncomfortable for us.

Matthew 14:28-30 “And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.”

As Christians in the 21st Century, sitting in our comfy armchairs and warm living rooms, it’s very easy for us to criticise the likes of “Doubting Thomas”, or the headstrong Simon Peter, who denied he even knew Jesus when He was being tried for His life by Pilate – or because he began to sink when he was went out for a walk on the Sea of Galilee!! But then, how many of us would have even dared to get out of the boat? Peter had

enough faith to get out of the boat simply because Jesus called him and told him to “Come”. And while ever he was looking at Jesus he was just fine, even in the middle of a storm. It was only when he saw the wind and, no doubt the waves, and took his eyes off Jesus, that he began to sink. He was ok, in fact, safe and dry, while he kept his eye on Jesus rather than thinking how well he was doing. He only got wet when he doubted!

But never forget, while Peter was doing the impossible, Jesus was with him, right in the middle of the storm, as He will be with you and with me.

SUMMARY

1. We can choose to live in the presence of God, whether we “feel” His presence or not.
2. He has promised to be with us at all times, until the end of all time.
3. He will never leave nor forsake us, even in the depth of a storm.

QUESTIONS

1. Have you made a habit of seeking His presence above everything else?
2. Are you aware of the presence of God in your day to day life?
3. Are you confident that He will keep His promise to never leave or forsake you, no matter what your position or state?

Chapter 7

PRAYER

The storms of life hit us all. Sooner or later we all face problems, valleys, battles and enemies. Many of these challenges can be draining and exhausting, particularly if we fight and endure them in our own strength – not calling upon the might and the wisdom of God to bring us through them victoriously.

Sometimes, indeed, we are taken by surprise when an attack comes, because our minds have been elsewhere, and we've not been match-fit, as a footballer would say, or "fight-ready" as would a boxer. When a World Champion boxer is in training, anticipating a fight with a serious contender within the coming weeks or even months, he or she, is careful about what they eat and drink, that they have enough sleep and are closely following the advice and guidance of their trainer – who is making them ready to withstand an onslaught from an ambitious and possibly formidable opponent, one that is determined to take their crown from them. No matter how accomplished a boxing champion or football player is, if they intend staying at the top of "their game", winning matches, titles and the crown and rewards that accompany victory, they resist the temptation to dismiss an opponent out of hand, thinking they will easily beat them. We have all seen what happens if and when sportsmen and women become complacent and overconfident. That's why some far less experienced and accomplished teams and contenders gain the reputation of being "giant killers," who slay their arrogant and over-confident opponents that failed to take them seriously. Just consider how Goliath taunted and mocked David, the insignificant looking teenager. Of course, Goliath didn't know David had been training for this fight by defeating both the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 17:34-37). Even so, David did not rely on his track-record of lion and bear slaying; he relied instead upon the covenant he and the

Israelites had with their God, the Lord of hosts, to deliver into his hand “this uncircumcised Philistine.”

James 4:7 “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Our first and foremost task and tactic in defeating the devil is to submit ourselves to God, then to resist the devil, and – only after that – will he then flee in stark terror from us.

We need not fear our enemy, the devil, but we do need to recognise that while he is **not** a roaring lion, he does go around **like** one, seeking whom he may devour. We read in 2 Corinthians 2:11, the apostle Paul says of Satan, that “lest (he) take advantage of us; ...we are not ignorant of his devices.” Unfortunately, in many respects, most of *are* ignorant of his devices. We tend not to recognise the enmity he stirs up between people, including Christian against Christian. We tend not to recognise the tares which he sows among the good seed of the Word of God in our lives (Matthew 13:25). We tend not to recognise it when he comes immediately after we have heard and received the seed of the Word, in order to steal it out of our hearts (Mark 4:15). Interestingly too, as a good friend of mine once recognised, the devil often sows thoughts into our minds “in the third person”, in a way that means we do not always recognise such thoughts as temptations. For instance, while I know these things can be born out of our own pride and arrogance, I’m sure we have all known times when a thought “crosses our mind”, such as “I wonder why she ignored me when she saw me this afternoon?” If we immediately stopped and considered if “she” even saw us, let alone ignored us, 99% of the time we could circumvent that whole process of traveling down a no-through-road of self-pity and division. After all, if the enemy sowed that thought in our minds, it is at the very least, highly unlikely to be true. Certainly, it’s not an honest or just conclusion to have been reached without due and balanced consideration, and it is questionable as to whether those thoughts are “pure, lovely, or of a good report.”

Our enemy, the devil, has been training for thousands of years and is well-versed in finding ways to defeat his foe, that is, we who are disciples of Jesus Christ. In order to stay “match-fit” or “fight-ready” we need to always be in training, following the instructions of our guide and mentor, the Holy Spirit, being careful about our diet, lifestyle and training schedule.

After a big match or title fight it can be all too easy to relax, lose our edge, our match fitness and fight-readiness. Following a vitally important title fight many boxers drop their 5am, early morning training runs, their 8-hour, daily exercise regime in the gym; footballers may stop their training programs during the “closed season.” That’s when they are most at risk of injury and defeat. If a boxer, footballer or virtually any other high-level sportsperson fails to keep up their tough training regime and, consequently gains 20 kilograms in weight, imagine how easily they will be defeated should they find themselves in a contest they were unprepared for.

We are warned in scripture to take this fight with our enemy, the devil, seriously, and to be aware of and to resist the temptation to slacken off from the training regime our Master and “Coach” has devised for us. We need to watch out for Satan’s attacks because he is always ready for a fight, and we must be ready to meet any challenge he may bring against us.

This is why we are called to both WATCH as well as to PRAY

Matthew 26:41 “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: (because) the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Mark 13:33 “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.”

Mark 14:38 “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.”

Luke 21:36 “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

1 Peter 4:7 “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.”

Living by faith does not mean you close your eyes and drive through life at 140 miles an hour. Believing God will tell you if there are any other cars on the road - and that if He doesn't, you can travel at speed around bends on the wrong side of the road, is not faith, it's blatant stupidity. So, stay awake, stay alert and “Watch out – there's a thief about.”

SUMMARY

1. Always stay match-fit and fight-ready, because we have an enemy who is intent on stealing from, killing and destroying us.
2. Stay awake and alert, be aware of his tactics. Do not be ignorant of his devises.
3. Be aware that he will sow snares of division and distrust between you and those around you.

QUESTIONS

1. Have you developed a habit of staying match-fit and fight-ready so you are prepared for any unexpected attack from your enemy?
2. Do you make it a priority to submit yourself daily to the Lord Jesus Christ – and then, from that position of strength and confidence, resist the devil in your everyday life?
3. What victories have you seen the Lord accomplish in your life through watching and praying on a daily basis?

Chapter 8

PERSISTENCE

Que sera, sera?

This phrase was epitomised by a song, sung by the actress Doris Day, which featured in a 1956 Alfred Hitchcock film called “The Man Who Knew Too Much.” In the film two of the cast were speculating as to what would become of them as life progressed; what would they be and what lay ahead on their journey through life. That produced the well-known reply, “Whatever Will Be, Will Be,” and was taken as to effectively mean, “Well, whatever happens will happen, what will be will be. There is nothing we can do about it. We’ll just have to wait and see.” From that point on, the phrase was used and understood to convey a fatalistic belief that future events were and are out of the speaker's – and our - control.

Unfortunately, many Christians appear to have taken a similar approach to life – and what happens in it. While not wanting to enter into a lengthy and somewhat controversial dialogue about something usually summed up in terms like “the sovereignty of God”, “foreknowledge”, “predestination” and so on, the problem with taking these principles to an extreme can be that they can all too easily produce a fatalistic approach to life, that nothing we do or choices we make could possibly make any difference. At the extreme end view of these doctrines there have been instances where people have chosen to never share the good news of the Gospel with others, even their own husbands or wives, believing that “if God wants them to be saved, they will get saved with or without me, or anyone else, telling them the Gospel message.” For one thing, God wants “ALL men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4), and such stances, and lack of action, also negate the very commandment that we are *to go* into all the world and *to preach* the Gospel to every creature, *to be witnesses* of and to the Lord. It ignores the fact that the Bible clearly says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing

by the Word of God”, “how can they believe unless they hear the message”, and “how will they hear unless someone is sent to tell them.” And to complete that circular proposal, Jesus said He was sending His disciples into the world to *TELL* people the good news of the Gospel, (John 20:21, John 13:20, Luke 10:3, Matthew 10:16).

NOTHING comes to those who **JUST** wait

Having proactive and persistent faith takes into account that we are commanded to ASK so that we can receive, to SEEK so we can find and to KNOCK so that the door can and will be opened. In other words, if we want, we are expected to ask, to seek and to knock. Even if we are waiting on, waiting upon or waiting for the Lord, we must do it ***IN FAITH*** – which is not a passive but an active, action-based faith. It *demand*s action. God knows what we need – and that before we ask - but He has declared that we have to ask, seek and knock, in faith, in order for us to receive.

***FAITH is a VERB (a “doing” word) not a noun (a thing or object).
And persistent faith produces persistent results.***

Faith is a FACT – and we have to act on a fact.

James 1:5-8 “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

We are commanded and, therefore, expected to have consistent and persistent faith. Without it, we are clearly told we are unstable in ALL our ways AND that we will receive nothing – even if we ask for it, unless it is accompanied by faith in God and in His Word.

We British people are often considered to be polite and well-mannered. That can be epitomised by our ability and willingness to stand politely and wait in an orderly line for it to be our turn to be served or to receive whatever it is we want or to do what we need to do. The problem that that passive approach to life in general can mean we all-too-easily fail to get what we want and need because we fail to push in and demand what we want NOW!! Of course, I'm not saying that we should be impolite, arrogant or downright obnoxious, but I am saying we need to recognise that God expects a certain amount of passion, persistence and tenacity which motivates us to be as committed as Jesus was in His life's ministry.

While Jesus was ministering throughout ancient Israel, the crowds would often gather around Him in their thousands, to the extent that on several occasions they were referred to as "the press." And that didn't mean they were all local newspaper reporters! See verses like Luke 5:1, where we read "And it came to pass, that, **as the people pressed upon Him to hear the Word of God...**" See also the accounts of Jesus feeding the 4000 and the 5000 men, plus women and children. In both of these cases this happened because the crowds were so persistent and insistent upon staying around, listening to and receiving from Jesus, they stayed long after the normal school home-time bell! Such was the persistence in the heart of the people, who demonstrated it by the way they flocked around Him and were not easily dissuaded from pursuing after Him.

In Mark 5 and Matthew 9 we read of Jairus coming to Jesus, seeking Him to come to his house, and to heal his daughter. While on their way, a woman with an "issue of blood" was so determined to get her healing, she somehow sneaked passed the crowds of people who were gathered all around Jesus, and simply touched the hem of His garment. As a result of this act of faith, she was completely healed. As for Jairus, he was now informed that his daughter had now died. Nevertheless, he was so determined to receive the miracle he needed Jesus to perform, he said

that if He (Jesus) came, “even now”, even at that late stage, and were to “lay (His) hands upon her, she shall live.” Such was his faith and persistence in his trust that Jesus could and would still give him the miracle he needed: life and health for his daughter.

Similarly, the crowds were so large in Capernaum (Mark 2:4), that the four friends of the paralysed man broke through the roof of the home Jesus was in, just to get to Him and have Him heal their friend.

All of these people displayed the resilient and persistent faith that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 11:12, when He said “And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” These are the people who have determined they will do whatever needs to be done to get from God the answer or solution they need from Him.

“In order to walk on the water, you have got to get out of the boat.”

In the middle of the night, in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was out walking on the water, about to overtake the disciples, who were traveling by the perhaps more customary means, by boat, when He is spotted by Peter. Peter could have quite easily done what the rest of the disciples chose to do, stay where it was safe, and at least relatively dry. But instead, he called out to Jesus, “Lord, if it’s You, tell me come to You on the water.” What could Jesus do, but reply, “Come”? So, Peter did as he was told and became only the second person in history to get out of a boat and walk on the water, to go to Jesus. (See Matthew 14:25-29).

That’s something we all need to learn to do – to step out and proactively do what Jesus has called us to do. None of the other disciples made a move to join him on the waves – but Peter stepped out and made history.

If God has told you to do something, He is able to enable you to perform it, even if it seems impossible. Remember this, apparently scientists say that the bumble bee cannot fly – because it is not designed to be able to fly. But the bumble bee cannot read, so it just carries on flying anyway. Likewise, those say it cannot be done (doing that which God has called and commanded someone to do), should not stop those who are doing it.

SUMMARY

1. We are commanded and expected to have persistent faith. A double-minded man (or woman), is unstable in all their ways - and will not receive anything from the Lord.
2. Faith is a verb, a “doing” word, which means we have to put faith into action.
3. We must be consistent in our asking, in our confession and in our expectation.

QUESTIONS

1. What is it that the Lord wants you to step out of the boat and DO?
2. What has He given you a vision for that He wants you to step out and accomplish for Him?
3. In what areas do you need to “hang in there” until you see what you are believing for manifested in the physical realm?

Chapter 9

PREACH

Psychologists have said that the number one that fear people have is of public speaking. Even the fear of death, or of dying, is relegated into second place, behind the fear the majority of people have about standing up in front of a group of people and speaking. Much of the reason behind that aversion is, no doubt, a fear of what people will think of you, think of what you say and how you say it, how you speak and whether or not you mispronounce words, stutter or stammer.

Similarly, very few preachers feel qualified in themselves to preach – for exactly the reasons I’ve mentioned – but perhaps also because we fear people will either openly mock or criticise us or, perhaps even worse, mock and criticise us behind our backs, when we’re not present to defend ourselves. Add to that the simple fact of life that we could say a football team is seen as only as good as the last match or even title they won, a sportsman only as good as their last victory, a salesman only as good as their last sale and, in the mind of a preacher, maybe they’re only as good as their last “brilliantly blessed and anointed” sermon!!

But, before we delve too much deeper into this, let’s look at a couple of foundational truths.

Proverbs 29:25 “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.”

The fear of man is a snare; it’s a trap. Once we get sucked into, or “suckered into” fearing what man thinks of us, we are trapped, because we’ll then always be wondering about what “they” think of us, think of what we just said or what we just did. And because there are almost 8 billion people on this planet, there will ALWAYS be someone who either

will, or may potentially think bad of who or what we are, what we say, what we do, what we wear or look like, or what we didn't say, do or wear.

But, besides anything else, God deliberately chose the weak, the base, the foolish and the things that "are not..." to utilise and work through them – so that people would see how wonderful HE is, rather than how wonderful (or otherwise) we are.

Then again, let us also consider the fact that God uses and speaks eternal truths into the lives of people through others who, let's face it, have holes in the front of their heads that open in such a way that air (which we call breath), comes out passed our lips and tongue, all of which, incidentally, wobble up and down, producing all sorts of noises. People hear those noises through different holes in the sides of their heads. The sounds are somehow deciphered into a legible and understandable format by their brains. And through that strange occurrence, God chooses to speak into people's lives things that can impact them for eternity. That analogy may sound strange to you but, think about it, in its simplest form that's what speech and hearing is. And, what's more, the Bible appears to agree with that analogy.

1 Corinthians 1:20-21 "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*"

So, God not only chooses speaking to get His message across, He uses the simplest of people to speak into other people's lives. And, as I say, most of the people He chooses don't consider themselves to be qualified to do the job, and even if they did, others didn't or wouldn't. Consider Jeremiah who was "too young", Moses, who said he couldn't speak, Gideon who was hiding, Rahab who was a harlot, Ruth, who was a widow, the apostle

Paul who said he was the chief of sinners, Abraham and Isaac who both lied, saying their wives were their sisters, Jacob, who was a schemer. And the list goes on endlessly.

A very common saying, often quoted by Christians, is “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words,” something which is usually attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. The saying tends to be used to make the point to Christians that what they DO, how they behave and treat others, etc., is far more important than what they SAY. Hence it is used to recommend that people should witness and evangelize primarily, or even exclusively, by what they do, more than through what they say.

While there is a great deal of truth in that, the Bible tells us in Romans 10:17 that “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” In other words, we could say that faith rises up within the hearts of people when they HEAR the Word of God – because that Word has been spoken into their ears, hearts and, therefore, lives.

Jesus Himself instructed, commissioned and commanded us to preach the Word, as well as to be witnesses to His majesty, strength and power, love, goodness and faithfulness. It is the GOODNESS of God which leads a man or woman to repentance – and that means someone has to be a verbal witness to that goodness of God. And, someone has to *tell* them about God’s goodness in order for them to hear and know it. (Romans 2:4).

We see in several scripture, including Matthew 10:7-8, that when Jesus sent out the disciples to preach the Kingdom, they were to go, and “As you go, preach, saying ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils. Freely you have received, freely give.” He promised that God would provide for their needs as they went out preaching and healing throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world.

In Mark 16:15 the disciples were told to “GO into ALL the world and preach the Gospel (the good news) to every creature.” In Luke 4:17-18 Jesus read from the book of Isaiah, proclaiming “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” And, of course, before He ascended back into Heaven, He commissioned His disciples to do as He had done, when He said “Peace be unto you; AS MY Father hath sent Me, SO SEND I YOU.”

That seems to me to be an explicit enough instruction to PREACH the Gospel, in addition to, not instead of, being an example of that message of love and reconciliation.

Isaiah 55:11 “So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

It’s God’s WORD that does and will make all the difference. It will not return to Him void and without achieving what He intends it to do in peoples’ lives. This is why it’s far more effective to preach the Word of God than all the words we can come up with in our own strength.

Paul’s commissioning of Timothy

Timothy 1:6

Paul, who effectively mentored Timothy, challenged him to stir up the gift of God that was in him, to fan the fire and the passion within him into flames once again. He charged him, or gave him a clear order, like an army captain would a sergeant or corporal, to preach the Word - whether

or not it was convenient and comfortable, to endure afflictions, to do the work of an evangelist and to fulfil his ministry.

Paul's final words of instruction to Timothy came towards the end of his second letter, in 2 Timothy, Chapter 4, which was written from Rome, shortly before Paul's execution. It was when, although Paul did not know how long he had left to live, he knew "his time of departure was at hand."

2 Timothy 4:2 Paul says Timothy is to "**Preach the Word**, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine"

v1 "I charge thee, before God. (Paraphrased), "This is SO serious a thing I'm going to say to you, that I call upon God to witness to what I tell you."

v2 "**Preach the WORD**, be **INSTANT** in season and out of season, when it's convenient and comfortable or not." **Preach the WORD**, not stories, theories or opinions. **Reprove, rebuke, exhort**, with all longsuffering and doctrine." (Using the **WORD** OF GOD, not your own - and spoken in love).

v3 "For the time will come when people (Christians), will not want to hear the Word of God, but will prefer stories, quick, slick, one-liners, things that tickle their ears; "nice" things, unchallenging things. They would have the attitude "Whisper 'sweet nothings' in my ear."

AMP "They will heap to themselves teachers chosen to satisfy their own liking and foster the errors they hold." **In other words, it will be OK with some people only if it coincides with what they already believe.**

v4 "And they will TURN from the TRUTH to man-made fables, ideas, ideals, rules and doctrines."

Clearly these are instructions we too should take to heart as we seek to win souls to Christ. We must preach *the Word of God*, not just stories and things that merely entertain and amuse the listener.

SUMMARY

1. We are to preach the Word of God, the Gospel message, AND to live the life we claim to have and to be living as Christians. We need to *speak* the Word of God, because they need to *hear* God's Word – because *faith comes by hearing* the Word of God.
2. We are to *speak* the Word of God when it's convenient or not, comfortable or not, whatever the season or atmosphere.
3. God's Word will not return to Him void and unproductive; it will produce the fruit He sends it to produce. That is why we must preach His Word above all else.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you step out with faith and confidence in God to speak His Word into the hearts and lives of people?
2. Do you speak His Word in season and out of season – whether or not it feels convenient and comfortable to your natural mind or feelings?
3. When was the last time you spoke the Word of God and saw the change it made in the lives of the people who heard it?

Chapter 10

PASSION

Revelation 2:1 & 4 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write..., I have something against you, because you have left your first love.”

Revelation 3:14 & 16 “To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write..., I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I want you to be cold or hot, but because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth.”

There is little more embarrassing than watching a young “courting” couple being openly, verbally and demonstrably affectionate. They sit, staring into each other’s eyes, holding hands or walking with their arms wrapped around one another and both so obviously want to be alone together so they can kiss and cuddle one another. I even feel slightly embarrassed at the thought of typing about it, as it seems so intrusive to mention or even make reference to their thoughts of intimacy and the desires that are associated with the closeness of their relationship.

Having said that, there is little more confusing, bewildering, even strangely frustrating watching a “courting” couple who seem to have little, if any interest, in being around one another. It sometimes appears that one of them is so obviously not as interested in, taken up with and maybe not as attracted to the other person as the other is with them.

When there is what we might easily refer to as a “normal” relationship, even or especially in the courtship stage, couples just want to be together, to talk, or *not* talk, but to just spend as much time as possible with each other, even if it means one having to leave the other’s side late into the evening or 1 or 2am – to get just a few hours’ sleep before getting up for school, college or work in the morning. If we saw a couple who did not

appear to want to spend that time together, to talk, to be in one another's company, to have at least some physical contact with each another, but instead, where one of them says they need to go home at maybe 9pm because they have to get up for work at 8am in the morning, we would suspect, and probably rightly assume, that things are not going quite right between them.

The two passages of scripture quoted above are Biblical examples of when things are obviously not, as God, our Heavenly Father, would want and expect His people, His church, to be in terms of their relationship with His Son, the soon to return Bridegroom, who comes again to claim His bride, the Church. That passage says that one of them is so lukewarm, it makes God feel sick. What an indictment on the relationship.

In these two passages it is apparent that at least a proportion of the Church, the Bride of Christ, no longer have the passionate desire to be with their Bridegroom that they once had. Things are no longer as intense in terms of their relationship as they were in the past. I have no intention, need or desire to speak irreverently here, but bearing in mind the straight-talking language of Song of Solomon is an expression of the two-way love-language conversation between the Son of God and His bride, I believe I can say that God wants and expects there to be a passionate desire in the heart of the Bride of Christ to be "intimately acquainted" with and passionately expressive in word and deed towards the Son of God who loved her and gave Himself for her. (Galatians 2:20).

Before you become offended by the above candid terminology, take a look at the following scripture.

Philippians 3:10-11 (Amplified Bible) "For my determined purpose is that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more

clearly], and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, [in the hope] that if possible I may attain to the [spiritual and moral] resurrection [that lifts me] out from among the dead [even while in the body].”

We’ve all seen and been astounded by people who we perceive as being “fans” of a football or rugby team, a chart-topping pop star, or an award-winning actor or actress. The word “fan” is, in this context, according to the dictionary, someone who is understood to be a “fanatical follower of a person, team or pastime.” But, of course, we all laugh at someone else’s fanaticism, whilst considering our own as being totally logical and understandable. Bear in mind, then, that someone once described a fan, or fanatic, as someone who is more passionate about something or someone than you are. We need to regularly ask ourselves, are we as passionate about and as fanatical a follower of Jesus as we were when we first “fell in love” with Him, the lover of our souls?

We know that’s what Michal, King David’s wife, obviously thought of him, when he “danced before the Lord with all of his might” when they brought the ark of the Lord back into the City of David. David’s response to her ridiculing him as he did so was, effectively, that he was dancing to and before the Lord, and it was mere coincidence that she happened to see him as well. But he added that he would become “yet more vile (or undignified) than this, and will be base in (his) own eyes” (and that the maidservants that witnessed his exuberant rejoicing would honour him for doing so). (See 2 Samuel 6). King David – who was described as a man after God’s own heart), was so passionate about His Lord that He jiggled and danced so joyously he embarrassed his wife!

So, what is this passion we are speaking of? According to the dictionary, passion is: a strong and barely controllable emotion, a powerful or

compelling emotion or feeling. It is a strong feeling or desire; a strong or extravagant fondness, enthusiasm, or desire.

One word that could be described as synonymous with the word “passion”, some would say, is “enthusiasm.” And here I think we find an interesting and exciting concept – because in both the Latin and Greek languages, the origins of that word means “to be divinely inspired”, to be “possessed by a god.” (OK, as we know there is only ONE GOD, let’s just take that as meaning to be “possessed by GOD”!!). It means “to be rapt, in ecstasy, to have fervent zeal.”

K.I.S.S. = KEEP IT SIMPLE STUPID

K.I.S.S., an acronym for Keep It Simple Stupid, has been attributed to various people over the years and, unfortunately, because of that, it is impossible to know who actually coined that phrase in the first instance. Maybe it’s a matter of, as a preacher I know once said, “The first time I quote something I’ve heard someone else say, I’ll say, ‘As so-and-so said.’ The next time I use it, I’ll say, ‘As I’ve said before.’ And, from then on, I’ll say, ‘As I’ve said many times before,’ because by then, I have!” So, who knows?!!

Suffice to say though, keeping it simple is always a good idea. Someone else (some say Albert Einstein!!), once said, “If you can’t explain it to a six-year old, you don’t understand it well enough.” And there is much wisdom in both of these approaches.

We read several times in the Gospels that the scribes, pharisees and lawyers often tried to trap Jesus, and to trick Him into saying something they could use to accuse Him of blasphemy. In Luke 10, we are told a lawyer stood up and tempted Jesus by asking, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied asking him what was written in the law?

In Luke 10:27 we read how the lawyer replied, quoting several scriptures in Deuteronomy (6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3, and 30:6). “And he answering said, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself’.”

The way in which such references in the Old Testament law are written clearly indicate that we are **commanded** to love the Lord our God in a strong and passionate way. And yet, the very fact that the instruction included elements of the human make up such as the heart, the soul, the mind and strength, it is also clear that our emotions are somehow involved in the way that such a love is evidenced in the lives of disciples of Jehovah. I would, however, also suggest that all of these references to loving the Lord our God can be understood to be a **promise** as well as a command. With that in mind, read it again with that emphasis: “Thou **shalt** love the Lord thy God with **all thy heart**, and **with all thy soul**, and **with all thy strength**, and **with all thy mind**; and thy neighbour as thyself’.”

Paul says to the Christians at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 11:3, “I have ***ESPOUSED*** you to ***ONE HUSBAND***, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, *so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*”

In New Testament times, a bride would be ***espoused*** to her future husband, like Mary, Jesus’s mother, was to Joseph. It was a binding agreement, effectively an engagement contract or covenant, during which time it was as if they were actually married – although without the physical consummation of that marriage. When Paul used this illustration, he was making the point that we, the Church, the Bride of Christ, have been espoused, promised, covenanted into an intimate and eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. He was strongly warning of his concern that the church at Corinth could be corrupted from holding to the

simplicity of being passionately in love with their Lord and Saviour – their soon-coming Bridegroom and King – to whom they, as we, are betrothed.

SUMMARY

1. If we are not as passionately in love with Jesus, our Saviour and Lord, as we were on the day we were born again, we are backslidden in our hearts and, therefore, in our experience. If that is the case, the Bible tells us clearly that we need to repent.
2. It should be our heart's desire to grow more and more intimately acquainted with our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
3. As part of His Church, the Body and Bride of Christ, we have been espoused to our Lord and Saviour and soon coming Bridegroom and King.

QUESTIONS

1. Are you as red-hot in your passion for Jesus now as you were in the early days of your walk with Him?
2. Is all else insignificant to you in comparison to knowing Him more and more intimately?
3. Are you seeking to spend time in His presence, getting to know Him, His heart and His ways, more than being distracted by other things?

Chapter 11

PETITION

We discussed the subject of prayer in an earlier chapter – and the fact that prayer is a two-way conversation between a believer and their God. Prayer is not merely an opportunity for us to, like children, present our Heavenly Father with a list of Christmas presents we hope that Santa or Father Christmas will bring us. Putting it bluntly, and not wanting this to be taken as an irreverent comment, “Our Heavenly Father is for life (eternal life), not just for Christmas.”

If we are not careful, and do not grow out of that sort of immature attitude, which newly reborn Christians often start off with, we can all too easily grow into people who, while not believing in “Santa” or “Father Christmas,” continue to only approach God when they need something, or need Him to do something. All that has changed is that we now present Him with a weekly or daily shopping list, rather than a “Santa Christmas Wish List.”

A good rule of thumb is that we should “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise, and bless His name.” (Psalm 100:4). Imagine how even an earthly father or mother feels if and when their child only considers them as a moneybox on legs or the taxi driver who is always available, on call day or night, to take them anywhere they want to go – and to pick them up afterwards. Mum or Dad appreciate the feeling of being wanted, but appreciate even more being wanted for who they are to their child in terms of relationship and fellowship, rather than for what services or gifts they can provide.

How much more our Heavenly Father? Consider how Jesus chided the people when immediately after He had fed the 5000 (plus women and children) with 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish, they chased after Him

when He departed by boat for Capernaum. When they caught up with Him, He said it was evident that they were only seeking Him for the physical, material things He was able to provide for them, rather than the miraculous deeds He could perform in their hearts and lives.

So, as we saw in Psalm 100:4, our first priority when we enter into His presence – and the awareness of His presence – should be our being taken up with the personhood of Jesus. The reader may find it beneficial to read about the life and ministry of John Hyde, sometimes known as ‘the apostle of prayer,’ who taught much on this subject. He taught that once we enter His presence with thanksgiving and praise, have worshipped and honoured our Lord and Saviour for who He is and what He means to us personally, in the right course of time, there will come a point when it is right and proper to present our requests to Him. But, as we have said, this is not the primary purpose of our coming to Him. If it were, what are we going to be asking for when we are with Him throughout all eternity, when we have no physical needs that have to be met?

Let us now then look at the rightful place of petition – and making our requests known to God. First and foremost, on this issue, let me make a seriously important point about balance here. We made the comparison above between treating God as someone who merely becomes the provider of our every need, to Whom we present our shopping or Christmas present wish list – and how our own parents would feel if this was how we treated them. Having said that, as a parent and a grandparent, I will testify to the fact that I will do my very best to ensure our now grown-up children and their families – and our grandchildren, do not go without something they need and, whenever possible, things that they simply want, rather than have a need of. What is more, I would expect them to come and ask me if they have such a need and, if there was any way I can help them out, I definitely would. In fact, I would be upset if they did not come and ask me, even more so if they felt they

couldn't ask me in the first place. We've been amused by our grandchildren asking for more "corn on the cob" (sweetcorn) at the dinner table. After they have eaten all that were left in the bowl in the middle of the table, they still asked for more. When we reply, "I'm sorry, there are none left", they quite happily reply, "Well, there's one on your plate! I'll have that!!" They're very happy to take the food off our plates if it's what they really want! And, come on, can you resist those eyes and the "I'm hungry, Grandad; feed me" look? How much more does God, our Heavenly Father, get pleasure from blessing us, His children? After all, He gave His one and only begotten Son so that we would not perish but have everlasting life. How can we believe He will not freely give us the things we need to live our lives, when we are living for His glory and for the furtherance of His Kingdom?

Matthew 7:7-11 *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"*

Philippians 4:6 *"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication (asking earnestly or humbly), with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."*

1 John 5:14-15 *"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."*

James 4:2-3 "You do not have because you do not ask God. (And) When you (do) ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

James 1:5-8 "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

Luke 11:3 "Give us day by day our daily bread."

Luke 11:5-13 "And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him'? And he from within shall answer and say, 'Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.' I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

SUMMARY

1. The priority when entering into our closet to pray is to come with thanksgiving and praise, not bring our shopping list.
2. Yet God expects and wants us to come boldly to the throne of grace and receive grace, mercy, wisdom and all we need to live a victorious life in Him.
3. But we must ask in faith, in full confidence, nothing wavering, in order to receive anything from God.

QUESTIONS

1. Are your priorities genuinely in order when you approach your Heavenly Father?
2. Are you confident enough to come boldly to the throne of grace – and to ASK?
3. Do you ask in faith for what you need from Him in order to live your life *for His glory*, rather than to heap them, and every other blessing you can get your hands on, to yourself, just for yourself?

Chapter 12

PLURALITY

Genesis 1:26-27 "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He Him; male and female created He them."

Genesis 2:18 "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him'."

The Bible clearly indicates that God created man (Adam) first, and then made woman (Eve) from a rib He took out of Adam's side. (Genesis 2:21-22). That was because after He created Adam, He said it was not good for man/Adam/maybe a man in general, to be alone. So, did God know from the outset, when He created Adam out of the dust of the ground, that He would "need to" make woman to accompany him throughout his life? Whatever your view on that, we know God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him'." Other translations say, "I will make a helper suitable for him." Whatever we may think of such terminology in the 21st century, it is obvious that God knew from the very beginning of mankind's arrival on planet earth, that it was not good for a man (at least) to be alone. He actually needed someone around to help him get through life. Besides anything else, the fact that increasing the population of the world from a grand total of one - to what is now fast approaching eight billion, was going to take the involvement of at least one more person – a female at that – as Adam couldn't 'multiply' on his own. After all, 1 x 1, has always equalled 1, even back then.

But when God said "It is not good for man to be alone," I believe it was because He made man, in fact, all of mankind in general after that, to be

social beings. They, like we, are all built to have a need to interact, to live with, connected to and in harmony with other people. We simply function better when we are connected with other people. Consider the simple fact that we believe in a triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; ONE God, three 'beings', three persons, three "parts", living in harmony, in community, with one another.

1 Corinthians 12 likens us to being members of THE, singular, body of Christ, and tells us clearly that as the physical body is obviously made up of many different parts, so the Church, the spiritual body of Christ, is made up of differently gifted members – who are meant to function together and in unity with one another, in the same way that the physical body functions in harmony. One part of the body cannot say it has no need for another part of the body and, in the same way, no member of the Church, the body of Christ, can say it has no need of any, or even certain other parts or members of that body, the Church of Jesus Christ.

At the point of time of writing this book, much of the world is going through a period of 'social isolation' or 'self-isolation' being imposed upon us, due to a global pandemic. But, the Body of Christ is a spiritual, rather than a physical, geographically-positioned, entity or being and, as such, can, does and must function on a spiritual plane that can operate whether or not we are physically in one another's company.

Whilst we may have the same blood grouping as many millions of people, be remarkably similar in looks and personality to one of our parents, even "identical" twins are never identical clones of each other because God made us all different from one another. There are no two people in the world with the same DNA, fingerprints or iris pattern. In fact, believe it or not, we apparently all have a unique ear shape and tongue texture.

God has made us uniquely different from one another and put us into a body, a fellowship, a small group, a marriage, a family, and then He places

us into situations where He can and does use the interactions of the different giftings, personalities and characteristics we all have, in order to produce the desired outcome He is wanting and looking for.

Despite our sometimes wildly different personality traits, backgrounds and so on, sometimes God mixes us all up together in way-out, even peculiar ways, in order to produce something no one would imagine was possible.

A dessert my mother used to make was called “Impossible Pie.” It was made by mixing together butter, sugar, eggs, self-raising flour, shredded coconut and milk – and putting the mixture in a pie dish and into the oven. Somehow, after one hour she would open the oven and out would come a delicious pie. The self-raising flour had, instead of rising, “sunk” to the bottom of the dish as pastry, while the coconut had risen to the top and formed a crispy layer that crunched slightly when you bit into it. And in-between was a soft, custard tart-like layer. If we could control our appetites and greed long enough, the end product would be allowed to cool, even put in the fridge overnight, so we could enjoy it the following day. Although you may well be drooling now at the very thought, and really need to find that recipe, my point is that no one could ever figure out quite how that mixture produced the outcome it did.

But that’s just what God does though. He takes a bunch of people who are so different from one another, blends them and fully integrates them together, puts them into life’s mixture of situations that sometimes are hot and fiery and sometimes cold and uncomfortable. But the outcome He’s wanting to achieve is that the Body of Christ becomes something that will grow and edify itself, giving pleasure to Him, itself and to others.

God will impact both the Body of Christ and the world, which is waiting to see the manifestation of the sons of God (Romans 8:19), when we function together in harmony.

When we are perfectly blended or mixed together

1 Corinthians 1:10 “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be *perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*”

A three- cord strand not easily broken

Ecclesiastes 4:12 “And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and *a threefold cord is not quickly (or easily) broken.*”

When we realise being 2 or 3 gathered together, He is in the midst of us.

Matthew 18:20 “For where *two or three are gathered together in My name*, there am I in the midst of them.”

When we begin praying in agreement with one another

Matthew 18:19 “Again I say unto you, that *if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask*, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven.”

This is why we are told in Hebrews 10:25, “Not (to forsake) the assembling of ourselves together... but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Do we need to meet together in the physical realm? Yes, of course. As socially connected human beings, we know it’s not good, nor “normal” for us to be physically isolated from one another for a prolonged or indefinite period of time. That’s why someone being put into “solitary confinement” in prison or as a hostage, is seen as an extremely severe form of punishment or torture. We know we need and, in most cases, desire and even crave contact with other like-minded people – and yet, particularly if and when we are restricted in terms of that physical closeness and connection, we must find ways to operate together in the spiritual realm in a way which manifests itself in the natural realm. We must determine not to become self-isolated, but to stand together in unity with other members of the Body of Christ.

SUMMARY

1. God made you with a God-shaped blank in your heart that can only be filled with Him, and a built-in need for functioning interactively with others.
2. God connects us to and with others as He sees fit - and in ways that cause us to flow together in harmony when we submit to His leading.
3. The blessing of God flows through us to others when we function in unity with other members of His body with whom He has placed us.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you know where and with whom you fit in life and as part of the body of Christ?
2. Are you functioning in harmony where God has planted and positioned you?
3. What benefits do you witness and experience in working together with those members of the Body of Christ with whom He has connected and knitted you?

Chapter 13

PERSPECTIVE

One invaluable lesson for every Christian to learn is to see things with a Godly and eternal perspective; to see things as He sees them. He is not looking for a quick and easy solution, but a lasting one, even if it takes a lifetime for Him to work it all out and set things into place.

Remember, our light afflictions, as the apostle Paul described his beatings, being stoned and shipwrecked, may seem to last a lifetime, to the point we sometimes wonder if they will ever end. But viewed in light of the “length” of eternity, they last an infinitesimally short period of time.

When Jesus told the disciples “Do not let your heart be troubled,” He linked it not just to the fact He cared for them, but told them something of the bigger picture – so that they could put all of this, all that was about to happen to Him, and would soon begin to happen to them - into perspective. “You believe in God, well, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms (or mansions) and I’m going there to prepare a place for you – so you’ll have a place to live for all eternity when I come back to collect you.” In other words, look at the bigger picture, not just the temporal things that happen on a day to day basis.

In Psalm 90:12, David prays, “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” What a big-picture viewpoint King David had when he said that. He knew life on this earth lasts only so long – and recognised that if he knew that he only had a certain amount of time left to live and to accomplish all God desired of him, he would make sure he did not waste one more minute, “passing the time of day”, just ‘chilling out.’ He would make the most of every opportunity to fulfil the call of God on his life. That would be a good and wise view of our earthly life-span for us to take too. What would you change in terms of what you are doing,

where you go and how you spend your time, your money and your energy if you knew, for instance, you only had 2 weeks left to live?

The Bible is full of examples of men and women who had their faults, failings, inadequacies and who simply just blew it. Samson got side-tracked by Delilah, Abraham and Isaac both told lies about their respective wives not being their wives, but their sisters. Rahab was a harlot. Gideon was hiding in the winepress. King David committed adultery then conspired to have her husband killed. The Old Testament reads like the script for several modern-day soap opera TV programmes all rolled into one.

Consider how many years it was between God's promise to Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, long before Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Abraham was strong in faith, but he did try to circumvent God's timing for the birth of the son of promise, and that's how he ended up with Ishmael. But God's promise was that he would be the father of many nations, and have descendants that, like the sand upon the sea shore, would be too numerous to be counted.

Joseph had a dream – but it took years to come to pass – and he had many challenges and “disasters” in the meantime; what with being thrown in the pit, the temptations in Potiphar's house, the years in prison for a crime he didn't commit. But he ended up as Prime Minister of Egypt.

David's family left him in the fields while Samuel sought out God's choice for him to anoint as King Saul's successor. He spent years fleeing from Saul, who plotted his downfall and even threw javelins his way. But he did become the King of Israel and the great, great, great grandfather of Jesus.

Consider the years in-between Jesus speaking to the scholars in the temple when He was just 12 years old and when His ministry actually started. He submitted Himself to His earthy mother and to Joseph for 18

years, becoming known by some merely as “the carpenter.” (Mark 6:3). Yet, when He was around 30 years of age, He chose 12 men to train as His disciples. One of them betrayed Him, one denied him, one doubted Him, many argued and fought with one another for position, and they all forsook Him and fled when He was most in need of a friend. After He died, was buried and rose again, in a matter of a few short weeks, following the day of Pentecost, these same men, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, began to turn the world upside down. (Acts 17:6).

So, don't judge a life, even your own, by the season you are going through today, nor the seasons of life that come one after the other.

“It's not over till the fat lady sings.” It's not over till God says it's over.

Thankfully we have so many promises of God we can hang onto and rely upon Him to bring to fruition in our lives.

Romans 11:29 (AMP) “The gifts and calling of God are (KJV ‘without repentance’) irrevocable – He never withdraws them once they are given, and He does not change His mind about those to whom He gives His grace or to whom He send His call.”

1 John 3:19-21 “For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not then we have confidence towards God. (And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment - that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that keeps His commandments dwells in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us.”).

Isaiah 55:10-11 “For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven, and returns not there but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, SO shall my Word be that goes forth out of My mouth, it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”

You cannot rush a cake cooking in the oven; it will be ready when it is ready. Everything takes time to grow and mature. It takes 9 months from conception to birth, for a baby to grow till it is “due” to be born. You have to wait for the DUE-TIME. Don’t judge a person, even yourself, based on a season. It takes time for things AND people to grow. You don’t always know what something will grow and develop into. In the meantime, everything is in the process. YOU are in a process. YOU are being processed!! It takes time for you to grow up. “Rome wasn’t built in a day”,

as the saying goes; and you won't grow from being a 5-year old, just starting school, to being a university professor overnight. We're not children, so shouldn't be always asking "are we there yet" as soon as the journey or process starts. Even wine and cheese take time to mature! What makes you think you're any different?

And, finally (as the apostle Paul used to say a few times before actually finishing one of his letters!), remember that we read the phrase, "and it came it pass" numerous times in the Bible. EVERYTHING comes to PASS. It comes - and it passes. The problems, challenges, difficulties, the things you are worried and fearful about today, will pass. Just like those things you worried about a few weeks ago, the details of which you cannot even remember now; they came – and they passed. They say that problems are like kidney stones, they are painful and may be painful when they pass – but pass they will.

So, relax – I've read the last page of the book.
The hero wins in the end – and we are on His winning side.

SUMMARY

1. It is important that we have a God-shaped perspective on things.
2. It is important that we have an "eternity-sized" perspective on life.
3. You are in a process. Allow God to continue working in you to bring you to a place of maturity in Him.

QUESTIONS

1. Are you resting in God's timing, knowing that He knows best?
2. In what areas have you learned or you are learning to be content that He is in control?
3. Are you content to wait upon God's specific promises to you - that they are "on their way", but that you need to allow Him to work them through in His own time?

Chapter 14

PRAISE

Throughout the book of Psalms, the various Psalmists wrote songs of joyful praise, exuberance and deliverance, at times along with, and certainly interspersed with frustration, depression, self-loathing and even, on occasions, almost anger at God. David himself swung the pendulum between these two extremes, one minute feeling like God had forsaken him in the valley of the shadow of death, questioning why at times the sinners and despots around him prospered while he felt abandoned. Then he would repent - of his sin and his false accusations against the one whom he would then call his strong tower, his habitation, his rock, the one to whom he could “continually resort.” David, sometimes a little like Job, would chide himself for being so foolish and too quick to jump to the wrong conclusion – and would set his mind to seek, to praise and to exalt his God. He learned to set his heart to see God upon His throne – exalted, high and lifted above the heavens. He learned to have a God-sized perspective on things, rather than a “poor old me” mindset.

Psalm 100:4 “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise, and bless His name.”

Psalm 30:11 “Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness.”

Psalm 34:1 “I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

Psalm 25:1 “To you O Lord, I lift up my soul. Let me not be ashamed. Let not my enemies triumph over me.”

A well-known 20th century Bible teacher used to say that by our praise and worship we establish a throne in our hearts – upon which we welcome God to come, be enthroned and dwell. That sense of awareness of His Majesty, living and ruling within our innermost beings, brings lasting peace and abandonment to His Lordship over all that comes our way.

I think David realised that it is hard to worry and to worship, to panic and to praise all at the same time. As we cast all of our cares and concerns upon our Heavenly Father, our fear and sorrow cannot help but be overtaken by peace, faith and comfort – through His abiding presence.

Have you ever sat and listened to the conversation between a small child and its parent, witnessing how a child can be so enthralled by just being “with daddy”? Recently we heard the two-year old son of a neighbour of ours say over and over again, “Daddy, I want a cuddle. Daddy, I want a cuddle. I want a cuddle, daddy. Daddy I want a cuddle,” more and more insistent as he repeated himself. He didn’t stop until his daddy gave in and took him up onto his lap and cuddled him for 10 or 15 minutes. That is what we ought to be like with our Abba, our Heavenly Father. As Paul the apostle said, he counted all the positive and wonderful things about his life as dung and rubbish in comparison to knowing and having Jesus in His life. Philippians 3:7-10.

When we are confident that our Heavenly Father has all things in His hands, under His control, and that He has only the best stored up for our futures, we will relax in His secure and everlasting arms. And that is the truth of the matter; we can cuddle up with the lover of our souls.

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

He has plans to give us beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and to exchange our spirit of heaviness for a garment of praise. (Isaiah 61:3).

Oh, by the way, I've had a quick read of the last page of "the book", the Bible. Not only does the hero win in the end, He has already triumphed victoriously over all that came against Him - and all that has and could subsequently come against *us*. That's why we can and should, *NOW*, praise our Lord and Messiah – and why we can relax now in the finished work of Christ. If we truly believed that, then we would praise and worship Him now for the victory He has already won. Celebration is the norm after a victory has been won and if you have eyes of faith, believing the victory has already been secured, you would realise you can rejoice in faith even before you see it with your natural eyes.

SUMMARY

1. Like David, we can praise and worship the Lord now – knowing He has already won the victory.
2. Praise and worship exalts our God above the challenges and battles we face.
3. The victory has ALREADY been secured, so there is nothing to stop you rejoicing NOW.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you ever feel like the battles you are facing are too big for you to handle and, if so, how do you respond?
2. Do you consistently choose to praise, worship, bless and exalt Him over and above the circumstances that come against you?
3. Have you read the end of the book – and settled your heart in the knowledge that because He is the Almighty God, we win - because He has already won? How does that knowledge change the way you worship Him and face the problems that periodically rear their heads in your face?

Chapter 15

PROLOGUE

I am aware that not everyone who will have seen and read this book will have already come into and established a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as their own Lord and Saviour. Maybe someone sent or gave it to you, and perhaps you do not even fully understand what you have been reading.

If this is the case, I want to introduce you to Him, and let you know that He can and will totally revolutionise your life, taking away all the guilt and shame about the things you have done which you know are wrong.

Every man, woman, boy all girl has been born with a natural disposition to rebel against the laws and rules which God has set in place governing the way He wants us to live. He wants us to be free from having a guilty sentence pronounced over us and the condemnation that accompanies it.

Because God so loved the people of the world – and wanted them to be free from that condemnation - He sent His perfect and sinless Son, Jesus Christ, who took the guilty verdict that would rightly have been handed down upon every person who has ever been born. He was crucified and killed, nailed to a cruel cross 2000 years ago. After 3 days in the grave, God raised Him back to life, something that was witnessed by many people, including 500 people on one occasion alone.

If we recognise, accept and believe that He took upon Himself our punishment and accept, by simple faith, that that substitution means we can walk free from God's guilty verdict, we can receive His forgiveness for our wrong doing. If we believe that God, His Father, raised Jesus back to life, then we can come into a personal relationship with Him – living out a life that is free from condemnation and the fear of eternal death.

What you need to do now.

1. Recognise and accept that you have sinned and not lived the way in which God created and intended you to live.
2. Recognise and accept that Jesus Christ took the punishment that was due to be borne by you for your wrong doing, so that you do not need to be punished too.
3. Recognise and accept by simple faith in what God has promised, that you can now walk free from condemnation – as you choose to set your heart and mind to live a life that pleases God from this point onwards.

A landscape photograph of a pond with trees and grasses reflected in the water under a cloudy sky. The scene is captured in a monochromatic blue and purple color palette. The sky is filled with soft, textured clouds. In the middle ground, a cluster of trees, including a prominent bare deciduous tree and several evergreens, stands behind a thick patch of tall, white grasses. The water in the foreground is calm, creating a clear reflection of the trees and sky above.

**FROM
FEAR
TO
FAITH**

AUTHOR: BILL PARTINGTON