



CPSC Notes

COUNCIL FOR PASTORAL AND SPIRITUAL COUNSELLORS

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Be the bearers of hope, faith and love

Dear affiliate

In Luke 22:31–34, Jesus addresses Simon Peter as the leader of the apostles and their spokesman. Jesus foretells Peter’s denial and restoration. Even though the disciples will eventually inherit the kingdom, their faith will also be tested. Satan wanted to sift all the apostles like wheat, a rough action that symbolizes tempting them to spiritual ruin. Satan wants to test the disciples so that they fall from the faith. The test of fidelity will be severe, and Simon will even deny Jesus, despite his protestations to the contrary (vv. 33–34). Jesus’ prayer for Peter will be efficacious.

Although it is clear that He prayed for all of them (John 17:6–19), He personally assured Peter of His prayers and of Peter’s ultimate victory. Peter’s faith will not permanently fail, and after his restoration, he is to fortify the faith of the other disciples.

Peter protested that nothing would cause him to deny Jesus, but Jesus knew better. Peter himself failed miserably, but his faith was never overthrown (cf. John 21:18, 19). The words: “When you have turned back” demonstrates that Jesus also knew that Peter’s denial would be temporary and that he would play a significant role in church history.

We are living in a constantly changing, corrupt world, challenging our faith and hope in God and man. We struggle to survive and sometimes cling to straws. In the emptiness of our strength and vision, this conversation between Jesus and Peter brings a strong message of hope and support.

Jesus is already praying for the outcome of our challenges, our suffering, our weakness, our transgressions. He is on our side and even while He knows what our actions will be, He keeps praying that we will not lose faith, will not drift away from Him as God.

In John 10, Jesus promised (v28-29) that He will not leave His followers, and nothing has the strength to rip



us from His hands. God is for us, who can be against us (Rom 8:31). We will fail but we will rise again (2 Cor 4:7-15).

The main thing is that we should not allow our mistakes to determine our futures. Jesus is praying that each of us will rise from our mistakes and become spiritual leaders, understanding the grace of God in its fullness. To be bearers of God’s grace and kindness, we must have had experienced it ourselves. Peter was an excellent witness, as he understood the incredible kindness of a forgiving God.

Paul was so excited about the redemptive work of Jesus in the life of all His followers: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor 5:17).

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Cor 5:18-19).

Jesus is praying for us to encourage people to find their strength in the God who was able to change our lives for the better. In Him is true hope and a definite future.

Through our own experience of God’s redemption, His calling for us is to encourage others to find their completeness in Him. We have the assurance of Jesus’ prayers that we will succeed in the end.

Prayer: God, give us the wisdom never to rely on our own power and insight, but to allow Your Holy Spirit to live in and through us and make us today the bearers of your fruit of hope, faith and love.

Dr Tertius Erasmus

CEO: Association of Christian Religious Practitioners and Chairperson of CPSC. ■

The submitted and compassionate heart of a chaplain

By Charles Dick of the Emergency Services Chaplaincy (Southern Africa)

Over the past forty odd years of serving our Lord and the last fifteen of those years as an Emergency Services Chaplain, it has broken my heart to see so many Chaplains and other Servants of the Lord come and go.

I must confess that I myself, have experienced significant ups and downs in my life. But fortunately, the Lord does not let us go. The Holy Spirit searches our hearts, makes intercession for us, and God lovingly turns each hard knock and failure into a developing and growing experience for us. (Rom 8:27–28).

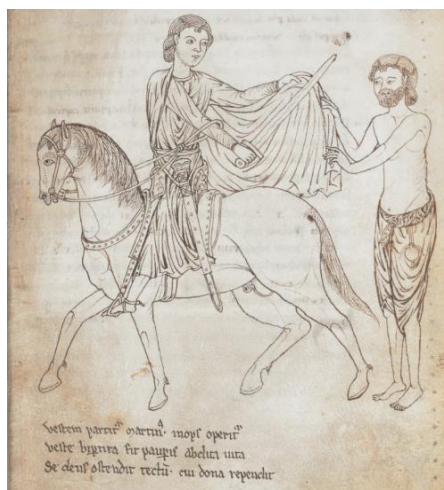
In analysing the reason for this fall away, I came to the realisation that a truly Submitted Heart is the one thing that has been evident in all the Chaplains that have endured the test of time. These are the Chaplains who still keep making a real difference in the lives of others.

In Proverbs 23:26 the Lord says, **“My son, give me your heart and let your eyes observe my ways”**. In these dear Men and Women of God, their total submission to the Lord is visible both in their words, deeds and their lives. (Eph 4:1) It is this total submission to the Will of God that enables Chaplains to, like Paul, be content no matter what circumstances they face. (Php 4:11,12)

The Calling that rests on a Chaplain is different to that of a Pastor, in that Chaplains are Called of God to provide support, comfort and encouragement to those that are traumatised and in pain. Irrespective of who they are, what their beliefs are and where they may be found. Like the Good Samaritan did, without exhibiting arrogance, self-importance, judgement or condemnation. Chaplains provide help to those that are experiencing what may be the very worst moment of their lives. (Luke 10:25-37)

The other dominant characteristic of these Chaplains is a humble hearted compassion for the plight of others. According to www.britannica.com, the title Chaplain dates to the early centuries of the Christian church.

As early as the 4th century, Chaplains (Latin *cappellani*) were so called



because of the use of the St. Martin's famous half cape (*cappella*, diminutive of *cappa*).

Tradition holds that Martin, a Roman Soldier who converted to Christianity, encountered a half-naked beggar at the gate of the city of Amiens in northern France. It is said that feeling compassion for the plight of the beggar, he cut his own cloak (*cappa*) in half and gave it to the beggar. This act is worth noting as it epitomises compassion for those that are hurting and putting the needs of others above our own.

Due to the compassion shown by Martin and his selfless action, he was later declared a Saint by the religious fathers of the day.

Psalm 116:5 teaches us that our Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.

Chaplains are called upon at all times of the day and night to selflessly respond to support and comfort those that are hurting. This may be to help a family who has lost a loved one during a violent crime or

been involved in a fatal or traumatic accident in the early hours of the morning. It takes a special kind of love and compassion for others to respond and deal with such traumatic situations.

To be effective in the Chaplain's calling, their compassion and empathy needs to be real. As we all know being false or faking empathy is something that is immediately sensed by the victims and adds insult to their trauma.

Experience has shown that only a truly humble and servant heart, showing true compassion, is experienced as revealing the Love of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the end that is what will bring comfort and break through the pain.

In conclusion, a Chaplain needs to walk in active submission to the Lord in Prayer, Worship, Word and Deed, bringing real Compassion and the Love of Christ to the hurting.

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Reconstruction in Christian Spirituality as missio dei: A new paradigm in the times of Covid-19

By Nicholas Mlungisi Notshaya

Reconstruction, both as a concept and a project belongs to the engineering vocabulary. Social reconstruction belongs to social sciences and involves reorganisation of some aspects of a society in order to make it more responsive to changed circumstances (Mugambi, 1995).

Following the outbreak of Covid-19 early March 2020, and its characterisation by WHO as a pandemic, everything changed for the worse. Covid-19 is illness. Louw (2008) sees illness as a sociological phenomenon. South Africa is currently in alert level 1.

Having noted the most negative and singular impact of Covid-19 in our lives, pastoral workers, pastors or ministers (and all Christians in general) cannot continue with business as usual. Covid-19 has given us practical framework in the context of *Missio Dei*.

Individuals, families, groups or institutions, have suffered and are continuing to suffer spiritual fragmentations and brokenness as a result of Covid-19. A new missionary strategy needs to be designed and implemented, in this context.

Imago Dei & Missio Dei in Christian spirituality

The sanctity of human life is based on the doctrine of "Imago Dei", (Gen. 1:27), that humans are created in the image of God and that whenever human life is undermined or destroyed; God seeks ways of restoring it (Waruta & Kiroti, 2000:6). The human being is a living creature because he or she received a spirit from God (Zach. 12:37; 8-14)

As we grapple with the implications of these famous Biblical Texts, we are also challenged to respond pastorally (*Missio Dei*) as ambassadors of Christ (hhjh) to the issue of human suffering in the context of Covid-19. In the post-exilic days of Nehemiah, reconstruction was undertaken as a program responding to the collapse of the Jerusalem walls (Nehemiah, 2:17).

Framework for the Reconstruction Project

South Africa is currently administering vaccination programme, with economic reconstruction and recovery plan underway. Christian immunization is spirituality, taken concurrently with medicine. The challenge of medicalization of health above spirituality, must be overcome.

Within the Practical theological paradigm, there is need to design spiritual reconstruction and restoration of

health amidst Covid-19. The interest in spirituality is not only confined to individuals who attend church who are identified as being spiritual or religious (Shea, 2000), but spirituality is an integral part to the health and well-being of every individual.

According to Puchalski (2016) spirituality is a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose and transcendence and experience relationship to self, family, others, community, society, nature and the significance of the sacred.

Alluding on the link between spirituality and health, De la Porte (2016) concurs with the emphasis placed throughout in the importance of integrating spirituality into the practice of healthcare.

Delgado (2007) cited in Barns (n.d) defines spirituality as a quality of the person derived from the social and cultural environment that involves faith, a search for meaning, a sense of connection with others, and a transcendence of self, resulting in a sense of inner peace and wellbeing.

We cannot deny that Covid-19 has also exposed the decline of moral standards and stability as revealed in stealing of funds allocated for protective equipment - what a disgrace!

Complicated grief as a result of people not partaking in the necessary rituals during burial of their loved ones, loss of employment and so forth. The framework for reconstruction is endless.

Note: The term *Missio Dei* has a long history. Aquinas first used the term to describe the activity of the triune God; the father sending the Son and the Son sending the Spirit. In a modern setting, Karl Barth set out the idea in a 1932 paper that mission was God's work and that authentic church mission must be in response to God's *missio*. ■

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The use of Multi-Level Neuro Processing (MLNP) in Christian therapy and coaching

By Dr Christo Nel

This is the second in a series of articles.

In this article we look at a very practical example of how to use MLNP-techniques in coaching businessmen and -women about their feelings about money.

How do you really feel about money?

Feelings power actions, having precedence over logic, practicality, discipline, and great ideas.

If you feel neutral about something, then logic, reason, and choice guide actions. But if you don't, your emotions commandeer what you do or don't.

Memories, beliefs and programming about money create strong feelings that drive every action you take and motivate you to avoid actions that involve increasing your income and savings and lowering your debt.

That is why many financial experts are fantastic money managers for their clients, but amasses significant debt themselves, or live hand to mouth. Since they're neutral about their client's money, they are logical, even brilliant, but it's the opposite with their own money.

It is incredibly important to make the effort to recognise your feelings about money in an honest way, since it's more comfortable to ignore them. Your true feelings, which are often just below your conscious awareness, determine almost every aspect of how you make and handle money.

If you don't have the level of money you say you are worth, emotions related to money may interfere with your ability to earn a lot more and handle what you have in ways that grow your assets.

Even if you have a good income, old issues can trigger severe negative emotions that keep you from enjoying what you have and hurt your well-being.

Your earliest view of money paradigm

Do you think your feelings about money stem from your current financial situation? Wrong!

You may assume that your negative emotions are a natural reaction to the frustrations of not having as much money as you'd like. But in reality, your current feelings reflect how you were programmed to feel about money, usually in childhood. Often, this determines your financial state more than any other factor.

You have a master money plan of sorts, which is unconsciously set by your early experiences about money and programmed from your earliest associations with it. It may seem ridiculous, but your view of money was



settled long ago. If you're not happy with your finances now, logic says the current unhappiness creates your negative emotions, but underlying emotions from the past create a sort of template for your dissatisfaction today.

Any attempt to increase your money goes directly against the unconscious template. One's anxiety level will rise and the closer one gets to his or her threshold, the less energy there will be to follow through on the plans to increase the income.

"I don't deserve more money"

You are wired with an inner set point indicating how worthy and deserving you are of all money, reward, and pleasure that is possible.

This inner set point acts like a pre-set thermostat to modulate how much you need to keep the balance at your current level of worthiness. It doesn't matter whether you have good self-esteem or confidence or feel worthy – the critical factor is what your range is.

When you set an intention and goal to go from your current financial level to way beyond it, you must work with your worthy and deserving set point.

How can you determine your worthy and deserving set point? Look objectively at your life. Right now, you are at the exact level of how worthy and deserving you feel in each category:

- Your income and overall wealth
- Physical health and ease
- Loving and being loved
- Success
- Relaxation time
- Reward
- Pleasure

You are always at your set point. Pay attention to anything on the list that feels off balance. Even if you are happy with your life, when you set a goal and act to push beyond where you are, you will often feel guilt arise because you have an unconscious set point that

governs the balance of your pain vs. pleasure and struggle vs. joy. Your internal set point includes:

- How hard you must work for money
- How much you should earn (with your level of knowledge, skills, experience, etc.)
- How much you should save
- How much relaxation time you're allowed
- How much reward, love, and joy you are allowed
- How much ease and pleasure in your body you're allowed

Your worthy and deserving set point in a great way governs how good you get in all aspects of your life. If one area gets out of balance, other areas may get offset to restore this inner balance. ■

This is an excerpt from **The MLNP™ Life Coach Workshop Manual 2020**. In MLNP you learn different techniques to test what people are really feeling about money and helping the brain to process those negative emotions and values. And what a privilege it is to stand by and watch how the Spirit of God change and renew people in a session or two.

Please walk

By Gerrit Laning, Stellenbosch

The sign winks at me through a blurred consciousness: "Please walk". An arrow is pointing somewhere.

I wonder where I should be walking to. I feel so utterly exhausted.

It is a day or two (I wouldn't know) after I came off the ventilator in ICU. Only later it is explained to me that the sign was put up when the intensive care unit was at capacity and additional high care space had to be allocated for Covid-19 patients.

The sign got me thinking and created a desire to share some of my perspectives on being hospitalised with Covid-19, which now leads my fingers on the keyboard. My hope is that I will find the words to give honour to my medical team who guided me through a perilous journey.

The journey started a number of days earlier with mild symptoms, a positive test and with the relentless attack of the virus which saw me being wheeled into an overflowing Covid-19 ward, where even the elaborate personal protective equipment (PPE) could not mask the sheer exhaustion and anxiety of the hospital staff.

Over the next few days, I shared a ward with fellow patients in a game reminiscent of Russian roulette, where some get better and others don't. The roll of the dice, for some, culminate in a weary conversation with harried physicians carrying the weight of health on their shoulders:

"You need more oxygen. We want to transfer you to the intensive care unit as soon as a bed becomes available..."

I need a moment to digress and tell you about the all-consuming relationship between oxygen and the coronavirus. As the virus enters your lungs, it causes



bleeding which in turn then limits your lungs' ability to transfer oxygen into your body. Extra oxygen flow becomes a necessity with the umbilical cord of an oxygen line being a literal breath-saver.

One of the symptoms of the infection is diarrhoea. In order to attend to the pressing and regular need for a toilet, one is forced to make the marathon journey without your umbilical cord of oxygen, with a fine balance between the need to rush and gasping for air like a fish on dry land. I did the 10-meter marathon a number of times, but eventually the feeling of suffocation won out with other dire consequences.

Sympathetic gloved hands and understanding voices dressed in PPE attend to me. I am overwhelmed with gratitude towards these people who, despite the physical distance held between us, became my people.

Now some of you might know the hospital environment better than others. One of my personally held beliefs is that a patient's attire tells a lot about their health. Enter the famous (or infamous) hospital "dress", which is worn with the open end at your back, held together by only a few straps.

Initially, wearing this "dress" feels like walking around half naked (which it is). Most healthy people will not voluntarily wear this couture, but in a process culminating in acceptance, the severely ill will just stop caring and ultimately embrace the "dress" with or without undergarments, until they actually start getting better!

Already feeling quite content in my hospital dress, I started the next stage of my journey: Intensive care... The seriousness of my condition is underscored by a delicate conversation with one of my physician angels

on the topic of my readiness, should things go totally awry, my wishes around continued medical care and the designation of my wife should I not be able to speak for myself, handled like the fragility of butterfly wings. Waiting to be taken to the ICU, silent tears erupted. This was getting both serious and overwhelming!

My immediate impression of the intensive care unit was one of competence, diligent care and an absolute focus on one person, the patient. Me! Over time my first impressions proved to be correct, with the only apparent deviation being the somewhat aloof demeanour of most of the physicians.

This, I later decided is a defence mechanism against the tide of despondency in an unevenly matched fight against a virus that knows no bounds or rules. In later days I, more than once, saw the doctors standing like sentinels at the other patients' rooms - perhaps willing their patients to win the fight. Always caring deeply...

My own fight was far from over and as the virus sunk his claws deeper into my body, the intensity and severity of my fight had to be stepped up.

The most difficult part followed when I am told that I am at the last fall-back defence and had to be put on a ventilator.

High flow oxygen is an unpleasant experience with hot, humid air being blown into your body by a machine that (at least for me) made the most horrendously loud sound. An aeroplane attempting take-off next to my bed for what felt like days on end...

As a believer, I turned to God when I fell ill and felt the conviction that "I will make it out OK".

At this point in my fight against the virus, I must confess, the firm belief became more of a desperate clinging to the possibility of my faith actually making a difference. Unbeknown to me, a few prayer requests from friends, work colleagues and family spread into a wildfire of prayer igniting people literally from across the world! Thousands of prayers carried me through the next few days.

Of being on a ventilator, I can tell you nothing, as I was unconscious the whole time. My next recollection was an awkward sign, a sore throat, more pipes and tubes anchoring me to my bed, an unbelievable tiredness and the surreal realisation that I had lost a number of days.

"You made it!"

My survival, against the odds, represented a victory for medical intervention as the last battle against the virus was fought on a ventilator, with medicine winning.

For me... grace!

One evening I sat on my balcony with a full African sun slowly dissolving in the bluest of blue oceans. Silence, beauty, bliss... only to be shattered by my next-door

neighbours hosting the mother of all parties. Indignant, I call my night nurse and ask him to help me get back into my room to escape the racket.

Lying in my bed it dawns on me: I was hallucinating from the morphine in an ICU that does not have windows, never mind balconies or, for that matter, a view on the beach. I should have been clever enough to spot the medicine induced deceit when the colours were so clear and distinguishable, as I am colour-blind in real life.

Speaking of windows and views, being wheeled back from an X-ray excursion, I realised that we were not taking the same route back to ICU. My caring, diligent and perceptive nurse took me to a real window to see the view of the mountains overlooking Stellenbosch.

She knew what good it will do my soul and she made it even more fun by telling everyone we met that I am absconding. Back in my room, the emotion explodes in waves of water escaping through my eyes.

After numerous tissues and a soft touch on my shoulder I can only find two words weighted and filled by gratitude: "Thank you".

The same scenario is replayed a number of times in the next few days with events of kindness. A nutritionist offering me a special meal to celebrate the victory, physiotherapists speaking encouragingly (while beating my lungs into active submission), cleaning staff - too many to mention!

Isolation has been a proven torture method for centuries. One of the most debilitating aspects of being infected and in hospital, is the total isolation from loved ones. It was interesting to hear from numerous nurses that their patients' isolation also weighed heavily on their own emotions.

Various digital options helped somewhat and the ingenious "window visits", allowed in the normal wards, made a huge difference. On the trauma experienced by my family, I might have to write a separate story; that is of course only once the story has learnt to float in our collective tears of fear, grief and gratitude.

My final stay in the general ward was thankfully uneventful with supportive conversations slowly turning towards going home. I also started heeding the call of the sign... a slow walk to the bathroom, eventually turning my small room into a walking course and then the last 20 metres out of the hospital was walked.

My walking is improving by the day and slowly it is beginning to dawn on me that the sign might have been meant for me after all.

Please walk.

From bitter to better: A Pastoral approach in dealing with the bitterness of Covid-19

By Benaya Niyukuri,
CPSC affiliate

Since the Covid-19 breakout in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019, the world has witnessed the most devastating public health challenge it has experienced for more than a century (Moore et al., 2020).

With the advent of Covid-19, people wear masks all the time, a routine previously the domain of medical practitioners. Furthermore, the social distancing, lockdowns, border closures and travel bans have caused serious consequences to the world economy.

The appearance of a new variant of Covid-19 has created more alert. The health system has been challenged by Covid-19 as the burden of care has been tremendous (Me & Hu, 2020:3). The eventual coming of the vaccine offers a glimpse of hope for many, while creating fear in those who are unsure what that vaccine may bring into their bodies.

The ongoing spread of Covid-19 creates a lot of bitterness in the lives people in the world today. This requires the intervention of pastoral care, a tool that can be used to help those infected and affected by Covid-19 to move from bitter to better.

The Hebrew word for bitterness is *marah*, a term that first occurred in Exodus 15:23, referring to a place where the Israelites arrived at after crossing the Red Sea. The place was named *marah* because its water was bitter.

When things get bitter, it is common for people to complain to their leaders. This is seen in the way the Israelites turned to Moses when they could not drink the bitter water which they came across three days after long walk in the desert without any water.

Moses had no quick answer to the Israelites. Having been affected by the thirst which his people suffered, Moses had nowhere to complain other than to God.

When He prayed, the Lord answered by showing him a piece of wood to throw into the water so that it became drinkable (Exodus 15:25).

As Hannah (2000) observes, there was nothing magical about the wood Moses put into the water to make it drinkable. It was a symbolic act preceding God's miracle just as it happened when Moses lifted his staff above the sea in Exodus 14:16.



After enjoying a drink of water, the Israelites received another promise from the Lord that assured them freedom from the diseases He had brought on the Egyptians, if they observed His commands (Exodus 15:26).

Another occurrence of the word *marah* is in Ruth 1:20 where Naomi refused to be called by her real name but suggested to be called *Mara*, which carries the meaning of "bitter." This happened when Naomi was returning to Bethlehem after losing her husband and two sons in Moab, a place where they had taken refuge due to the starvation that had devastated Bethlehem.

In this regard, Naomi shifted her bitterness to God due to her relationship with Him. According to Reed (2000), "Naomi had such faith in God and His personal involvement in her life that she knew the bitter things she experienced were from Him. Her grief was real; obviously she took God seriously." For this reason, the Lord did not delay to deal with the bitterness that haunted Naomi's joy (see Ruth 4:13-17).

These two biblical accounts about bitterness illustrate how people get stuck when life becomes bitter and how God can intervene in helping His people move from bitter to better. The Israelites grumbled against Moses when they had to test bitter water. As a leader, Moses realised how helpless he was, thereby turning to the Lord in prayer for a solution.

Covid-19

In a time of Covid-19, people look to their leaders for solutions. In this instance, turning to God in prayer brings the best solution. In addition, when Naomi became a widow who lost her sons, she found herself with her two daughters-in-law whom she did not wish to take to Bethlehem. In her bitterness, Naomi acknowledged the Lord Almighty who eventually moved her from bitter to better. In the event of Covid-19, many people are testing the bitter test of illness, either for themselves or their loved ones.

Besides, bitterness increases when people are not able to take care of hospitalised loved ones or attend the funerals of those who succumb to Covid-19. The loss of income and extreme poverty that came with Covid-19 are other matters of concern. This situation requires pastoral care that excels in prayer and that encourages people to keep trusting the Lord who moves them from bitter to better.

In order to instil hope for people who face the bitterness of Covid-19, it is good to depend on God's promises. Just as the Lord assured the Israelites that He is the Lord who heals them (Exodus 15:26), those who face the bitterness of Covid-19 can hope to get healing from the Lord. Furthermore, the Lord promises, "But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds" (Jeremiah 30:17).

Healing does not imply the absence of disease. It is a holistic process which God administers in the lives of His people spiritually, physically, emotionally and socially. The presence of Covid-19 has affected people in all facets of life. In this regard, hope means putting trust in

the Lord who is able to provide healing for those who are sick and to provide for those in need.

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Further meditations in a time of lock-down

By Dr. Enrico Casaleggio of Dutch Reformed Church Fichardtpark, Bloemfontein

The Bible is not a book that is time-driven. It is a book that asks that you read it carefully and meditate on it in silence. Reflect on it by night and in the day. Yes, meditate! When it comes to the Bible, read slower. Think about what you are reading. Apply it to every aspect of your life.

This series "His faithful love endures forever" leads us to seize the opportunity to become quiet with God while reflecting on His Word. Psalm 148 is a call for all living beings to praise the Lord. Like the birds that sing louder in the lockdown we, the crown of God's creation, can serve the Lord with greater devotion! Let's praise the Lord!



Stay away from evil

Psalm 1:1: *Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.*

When things go badly with some organization or sports team, when they reach a crossroads, then the solution often lies in having to return to the basics of the matter. When a team performs poorly, the coach does not say: "We did not play well". No, he simply says "Back to basics!"

When we look back on the state of lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we also find ourselves at such a crossroads: A point where we look to the past and the future and have to consider our relationship with the Lord. The lesson from Psalm 1: Back to basics!

Verse 1 says, "O, the joys of those ... ". It then expresses the progression of the person's fall, the person who

busies himself with evil. The writer says: "and do not follow ... or stand ... or join". Note this: follow ... stand ... join.

This is about the person who befriends the wrong people, with people who do not know and do not want to know God, people who find joy in sin. And so, you are sucked into this person's God-degrading world. And that is sin's way: Slowly, it draws you in. First you just walk together, then you stop and finally you join.

The message behind it is to avoid evil! Do not let it fascinate you. It is not so interesting. Avoid it. Stay away from it! To live a life that honours God, then Psalm 1 tells us: Stay away from evil!

Prayer: *Lord, in this time where we are forced to look at the basic points of departure of life. Help us to also look at the basics in our relationship with You. Help me to stay away from evil today. Amen*

Find joy in reading the Bible

Psalm 1:2: *But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night.*

The second basic thing to live as God expects us, is to derive joy from His Word. It is not good enough to say you know what you *should* do:

- I know I should read the Bible regularly;
- I know I should go to Bible study or Bible school;
- I know I should talk to others about God's Word;
- I know my Bible knowledge is not sufficient and I should improve it.

Knowing what you *should* do is unfortunately not part of the basics you need to return to. Only when you actually do these things, do you fulfil what the Lord asks of us in Psalm 1.

Note the words of the Psalmist in verse 2. He says we must find joy or delight in God's Word. Joy is an emotion. We need to read God's Word, *and* get excited about it.

Verse 2 also says we should meditate on God's Word in day and at night – applying it to our complete life. Furthermore, the Bible is not a book to be read in a hurry.

Regardless of trying to master speed reading skills, the Bible is a book to be read slowly! Reflect on what you read. Apply it to every aspect of your life.

Recently an event was announced of a group by endeavouring to read the entire Bible in 90 hours on a relay basis. Why? How is God being honoured by this? Will these people grow spiritually as a result? That is not the purpose of the Bible.

The second basic thing when facing a crossroads is to find joy in God's Word. Meditate on it and make it a part of your life.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for your wonderful Word. Help me to find joy by reading it. Help me to meditate on it daily.* Amen.

Spiritual growth is essential

Psalm 1:3: *They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.*

Plants that is watered regularly will grow well. South Africa is, however, generally a dry country. When our environment is caught in the stranglehold of a drought, we realize again the importance of water for growth in the plant kingdom.

In a similar way, Psalm 1 says that if we avoid evil and find joy in God's Word, we can expect spiritual growth. We have a constant need to grow. A child wants to grow up. Toddlers want to go to school. Learners in primary school want to go to secondary school. Then they cannot wait to find a job.

Young believers that just came to know the Lord are children in the faith. We yearn to grow spiritually and expect our relationship with the Lord to deepen, to grow more and more in His image.

But the longer we are believers, the more complacent we become in our relationship with the Lord. We care less about whether we are growing.

If we examine our faith life, telling ourselves, "Back to basics!", then Psalm 1 reminds us that one of those basic things is to keep on growing spiritually. Make it your intention in the time ahead: Grow spiritually!

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones summarises spiritual growth as: *"What it means, therefore, is that men and women who walk in the light are seeking God. They desire to know God better; they are concerned about the glory and honour of God; they are anxious to please God. They realize that for very many years they have been living in a realm which is antagonistic to God, and their whole idea is to be as different as they can. That is walking in the light, living to the glory and honour of God. God is their Master; they seek righteousness and are concerned about being holy"*.

Prayer: *Lord, help me to understand the importance of spiritual growth. Help me to look more and more like the Lord Jesus today.* Amen.

We always live under God's care

Psalm 1:6: *For the Lord watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.*

When we progress on God's path of sanctification, we do so under God's care. Sometimes it seems too difficult for us to continue on God's path, sometimes its cost seems too high to us. We should know that also in 2021, with Covid-19 and other suffering, that God is constantly with us, every moment of the way. In Psalm 1:6 we read that the Lord leads the godly. The word "lead" in Hebrew indicates an ongoing process. A process that takes place every moment.

The Lord has an intimate knowledge of every aspect of my life. He knows the challenges I face. He enables me to keep going, day by day. The promise of the Lord that we will always live under His care can be a constant and great comfort to us.

Observe: We rarely grow as people because we have all the answers in life. No! It is the questions in life that lead to growth. In resolving these questions – the "why?", the "where?" and the "how long yet, Lord?" – we grow emotionally as well as spiritually.

It is almost always some loss that paves the way to a deeper spiritual life. If you find yourself in a time where you feel you are even forsaken of God, a time of pain, an extended period of being sick, or rejection, a time where you have suffered one loss after another, be

encouraged! The Lord is with you every step of the way. You live under His protection.

Psalm 1 is a summary of the Book of Psalms. It tells us in short that we must avoid evil. Stay away from people who do not have God's glory in mind. The Psalm also wants to remind us to read God's Word daily, to find joy in it and to meditate on it. Also remember the importance of spiritual growth. And amid the chaos of Covid-19 and all the other trials, remember that God is with you. He is interested in every aspect of your life.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for walking with me all the way. Through the places of light, but also in darkness. Amen.*

Who is God to me?

Psalm 8:1: *O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens.*

While Psalm 1 is known as "the two ways" poem, Psalm 8 can be understood under the heading: "The two questions". And these questions are: "Who is God to me?" and "Who am I to God?"

Today, then, the first question: *Who is God to me?* As a shepherd, David often spent his nights in the open field, knowing the stars well. One can hear how he must have marveled at the firmament when he says in verse 1: "How glorious is all that You have placed in the heavens". In verse 3 he also says that he sees God's heaven, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars to which God has given a place.

If we were to ask David, "Who is God to you?" then his answer is in the first place, "*He is the Almighty. The Creator of heaven and earth. He gave a place to every star, every planet. There is no God like Him*". Secondly, he says that He is a God with whom you are in a personal relationship with. He speaks of the Lord as *Our Lord*. He is *our God*. We are in a personal relationship with Him.

And what is *your* answer to the question: *Who is God to you?* One of the members of the pop group, *The Beatles*, said, "Jesus is a small, green, slippery garlic eater". The communists said that religion and faith in God is opium for the human spirit.

Who is God to you? This is the most important question in life. Is He to you the God of iron and concrete, but also the Creator of the fiery red sun? Is He to you the God of the telescope, but also the God of the microscope? The Creator of the whale and the goldfish? But more than that, are you also in a personal relationship with Him? Can you also, like a David, speak of Him as "Our Lord"? Can you, like Paul in Philippians 4:19, speak of Him as "My God"? Yes, who is God to you?

Prayer: *Lord, I want to confess You anew today as the Creator of heaven and earth. I also want to confess You anew as my Saviour. Thank You that I can be in a personal relationship with You. Amen.*

God thinks about me

Psalm 8:4: *What are mere mortals that You should think about them, human beings that that You should care about them?*

Yesterday we asked the question: *Who is God to you?* Today we ask the question: *Who am I to God?* We have already seen David looks at the starry sky. He marvels at God himself. God is indescribably great. And we are but small. Who are we really? A pin point in an infinite cosmos? A heartbeat in a corner of the universe? Less than nothing?

Not really. Because God appreciates us. He esteems us, the little human beings, highly. In verses 5 and 6 we see that He made us just a little less than Himself. He lets us rule over the work of His hands. We have an incalculable value. No price can be placed on us.

In verse 4 we read, "*What are mere mortals that You should think about them, human beings that that You should care about them?*" You have value because God thinks about you. There are few phrases in the Bible that are more comforting to me. God thinks of me! I am somewhere in the great mind of God. To Him, I am not just reduced to a eulogy in the *In Memoriam* column of a newspaper. No, God is thinking of me!

The fall of man resulted in us not thinking about Him at all. We wanted to think God away.

When you sit alone in your room and wonder about the value of life, know that God is thinking of you. When you struggle with the mysteries of life, God is thinking of you. When you cannot cope with your pain, God is thinking of you.

The great thought of God, is also the great act of God, because God created and *recreated* us. That is why He rose from the dead - to remind us every day that God does not forget us. This Psalm wants to tell us that man is not just an educated animal. No, we were created in the image of God. And the important message of this Psalm: God is thinking of me!

He thinks of the famous, but also the infamous, the winners and the losers. He thinks of the Einsteins and the wretched, of the kings, but also of the children and the infants. He thinks of the great and of the broken. Yes, He thinks of me. I can think of nothing greater than this.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for the comfort in the knowledge that you are thinking of me. Amen.*

I did it my way?

Psalm 18:29, 32: *In Your strength I can crush an army; with my God I can scale any wall ... God arms me with strength; He makes my way perfect.*

The world is looking up to people who have achieved the top positions in life. People who can say, like Frank Sinatra, "I did it my way". Or maybe rather, "I destroyed

it my way". However, the Bible teaches: "Be the person God has always wanted you to be".

David is certainly someone who could boast that he has achieved things in his life. He was still a young boy when he defeated Goliath and after that his achievements only increased. Yet he knows very well that it is actually God who is behind his success. In Psalm 18:29 he says, for example: "*In Your strength I can crush an army; with my God I can scale any wall*". In verse 32, David says, "*God arms me with strength; He makes my way perfect*".

Wherever you go in this world, you will encounter people who will want to make of you someone other than what God had in mind for you. You will often be tempted to make yourself someone other than what God had in mind. And that's when you do stupid things. This is when you, often under peer pressure, do things you would not normally do.

All of us make mistakes. Some mistakes can be corrected more easily than others. Often the mistakes we make when we are not who God wants us to be, are the most difficult to repair. God has been waiting for you for centuries to be the person He wants you to be. Do not disappoint Him by wanting to be someone else. Someone once said, "You were born an original. Don't die as a copy".

We must be careful not to buy into the world's idea of success. You can reach the top of the ladder to success, only to find that the ladder was standing against the wrong wall. However, the Psalmist makes it very clear that it is only in the Name and in the power of God that we can do what He wants us to do. It is only in His Name that we can be who He wants us to be.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you so much that I can face this day knowing that nothing will happen to me that You and I cannot handle together. You are with me every step of the way. Thank You that I can attack the city wall and the army in Your Name. Amen.*

The Lord enables me

Psalm 18:34: He trains my hands for battle; He strengthens my arm to draw a bronze bow.

David says: There are some things that are too difficult for me to do. I'm not getting it right. However, the Lord often enables me to do these extraordinarily difficult things. It is He who helps me to get the impossible right. That is why David says in verse 29: "*In your strength I can crush an army; with my God I can scale any wall*". In verse 33 he says: "*He makes me surefooted as a deer, enabling me to stand on mountain heights*".

Each of us could witness that there are impossible things in our lives. Things that are beyond our ability. For us, too, it would be true that God can enable us to do these things we would normally not accomplish. Your ordeal may feel like the tightest bow to you, a

bronze bow that you cannot stretch. You need to know that you can trust the Lord. He will help you to stretch this tight bow, to face this ordeal squarely.

We must realize that the Lord can do everything himself. That He can stretch the bow on His own. But He does not. He teaches and enables David to do this. He gives David the ability to do so. But David is the one who finally has to physically bend the bow.

Nor can we just sit back and say that we trust in the Lord. No, we also have a responsibility. Although the Lord gives us the abilities to face these trials and that He provides the people who encourage us, it is still our own responsibility to address the problems and crises. The Lord teaches you to stretch the tightest bow, our text says, but if you do not take that bow in your hands, it will never be stretched. Accept your responsibility.

Be who God always wanted you to be. God enables you to do the most difficult things, but you must also accept your responsibilities.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you that you are the Almighty. No trial, no crisis is too difficult for You. Thank you so much for teaching me to be able to stretch even the stiffest bow. Help me to accept my responsibilities as well. Amen.*

God protects me - just think back

Psalm 34:7: *For the Angel of the LORD is a guard; He surrounds and defends all who fear him.*

God protects me. In our text, David compares the protection of the Lord to the Angel of the Lord setting up His camp around His children. It is a beautiful image that says the Lord is around His children, protecting them.

As South Africans well are acquainted with the image of a circle of wagons, fortified with branches, drawn up when the Trekkers camped at night, for protection against predators or other attackers.

David uses the same idea when he says that the Angel of the Lord is around His children to protect them. When they entered the Promised Land, the Angel of the Lord protected His people (Joshua 5: 13-15).

For us today, this is also a wonderful image, namely that of God who is around us to protect us. We can think back and remember how God protected us in the past.

It is so that we all experience trials from time to time. We may become discouraged and wonder what will become of us. The trials may be our work, the lack of work, our health or our relationships.

Our text assures us today that God protects us in the midst of hardship and worry, that He draws His camp around His children. But He also wants to say to you today: "Think back a little to the past: Have I ever let you down? Have I ever distanced myself from you? Is it not I who has always given your daily bread, even if it was

with the crows like for Elijah? As I protected you in the past, I still protect you today. If you want to get discouraged, just think back a little".

Prayer: *Lord, sometimes the worries of the present threaten to make me forget about Your faithfulness in the past. I reaffirm my confidence in You. Amen.*

Experience God's protection with all your senses

Psalm 34:8: *Taste and see that the LORD is good! Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in Him.*

We may sometimes be tempted to think that God's help, or His protection, is just a kind of woolly concept. We might say: "Yes, the Lord certainly helps and protects us, but I do not really know if this is always the case. I sometimes ask for God's protection, but I also do not always know if He protects me and if He feels like it.

In our text David says: "Taste and see that the Lord is good! Oh, the joys of those who takes refuge in Him" (New Living Translation). Come and experience and see for yourself that the Lord is good! It is well with the man who takes refuge in Him.

David says that the goodness and protection of the Lord is something he experiences with all his senses. He can even *taste* and he *see* it. God's help and protection is something concrete to him. It is not just a vague knowledge that God is protecting him.

David has concretely experienced how God saved him from the hand of Saul and from Abimelech. God's protection, for him, is not just something vague and general. No, he links specific events to it.

Learn to trust Him for specific matters concerning protection. As the schools began and many travel, let us trust Him for His protection. Let us also trust Him for the protection of our property and our health.

You know what is in your life that is a threat to you. Trust God that He will protect you. Let His protection be something concrete to you, so that you can say like David, "*I experience God's protection, I see God's protection. I even taste God's protection*".

Prayer: *Lord, thank you so much that I may enter into this day with you. Thank You that we can be calm because we know You are carrying us. You take care of us. We experience it, we see it, we even taste it. Amen*

Beware of trust stealers

Psalm 37:5,7: *Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust Him, and He will help you... Be still in the presence of the LORD and wait patiently for Him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes.*

Some people have a one-sided image of God: A God that blesses them with wealth and health. Everything is

always just too wonderful. They say: "Everything will go well with me. My barns will be full again, as always. I will get everything I want again".

However, the Word of God teaches that not everything always goes well with believers. Many of the Psalms therefore asks: Why do bad people often do so well, when God's children have to suffer so much?

If you have already ended up in the whirlpool of life, if you have calluses on your knees and blisters on your soles, you will know that life is not always easy. You experienced that even with God's children, things are not always going well.

David warns us that there are things that can undermine our trust in God. Verse 7 warns that we should not be alarmed at the prosperous life of a crook. In verse 35 David also says that he has seen how the wicked shoot up like plants.

Spurgeon writes that to witness the success of unbelievers is to the child of God like heartburn to the soul. How well we know praying for a cause without any results. So many things that keep going wrong. Or maybe after all the effort you put in, others get credit for something.

However, in verses 2, 9, 10 and 15, David says that believers should not worry about it, because the wicked will be judged by God.

David says the only way to regain our trust in the Lord is to look in the right place. Do not focus on the breach of trust, but focus on God himself. In verse 5 we read in another translation: "*Leave your life to the Lord and trust in Him, He will take care*".

Verse 25 is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible: "Once I was young and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly abandoned or their children begging for bread".

Prayer: *Lord, I do not want to look at the breach of trust today. I do not want to upset myself that the wicked are often so well off. I want to focus on You and Your care. Amen.*

Be honest with the Lord

Psalm 13:1,2,6: "*O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? How will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand? ... But I trust in Your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. I will sing to the Lord, because He is good to me*".

David is again in a struggle of faith. The wonderful thing is that when he feels that the Lord is ignoring him or not treating him as he thinks it should be, then he is not staying away from the Lord. He is not saying that this is a hopeless case anyway.

No, David never stops praying. In fact, he prays even more. He speaks his heart to the Lord. That is why he

can finally move on to the point where he praises the Lord. In verses 5 and 6 he says: *"But I trust in Your un-failing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. I will sing to the Lord because He is good to me"*.

I believe each of us has had the experience that our prayers do not go further than the roof. We experience that God does not hear. Or worse: that He hears, but that He ignores you. Your child does not get well, your husband does not stop abusing alcohol, your boss does not stop harassing you, and so on. And many times, these matters, which we see as unanswered prayers, become pebbles in the shoe of our relationship with the Lord. Things that become blockages so that we cannot praise and glorify the Lord.

When that happens, we must not stop praying, we must continue to pray more than ever. Then we must settle the matter with the Lord. Be honest with the Lord and tell Him how we feel about it. He knows everything anyway. We cannot hide from Him how we feel. Let us be honest with Him about it, as David set the example for us. Settling the matter honestly with Him remove the hurt so that we can again praise and glorify the Lord as we should.

Prayer: *Lord You know everything. You also know when we feel that You are neglecting us. Help us to bring these pebbles in our shoe to You in honesty so that we can grow again in our relationship with You. Amen.*

The power of prayer is in God to whom you pray

Psalm 61:1,2: *O God, listen to my cry! Hear my prayer! From the ends of the earth, I cry to You for help. Lead me to the towering rock of safety.*

Another translation puts our text in an interesting way when it says: *"From the end of the earth I call on You"*. To the Israelites, the temple and the ark of the covenant, which were inside the temple, were the centre of the world. As soon as you left the land of Israel, they believed that you were at the ends of the earth. David wrote this Psalm while fleeing for his son Absalom and was therefore outside the borders of Israel at that time. That is why he says in verse 3: *"From the ends of the earth, I cry to You for help"*.

David says that he is invoking God from the ends of the earth - the place or the situation in which you are praying, cannot lessen the power of prayer. The power of prayer is not primarily in the prayer, but in God to whom you pray - and God is everywhere. Nothing is an obstacle for Him, because one thing is not more difficult for Him to do than another.

We must realize that nothing is impossible for God. We sometimes pray with the attitude of: "Oh, let me pray even though I don't want to. I don't have anything to lose". We may think that praying for some of our country's rulers will not make a difference. However, there

are Christians who pray for world leaders and the Lord also answers those prayers. The world leaders are not stronger than God.

Let us pray faithfully for Christians in countries where they are persecuted for their faith. Let us pray faithfully for the leaders of those countries. As for your personal life, you need to realize that God can change matters through prayer. Trust Him for that. As in the case of David, we can also often end up in a situation where we may feel that God is not listening to us. You must then realize that there are no obstacles that can limit God! Settle the matter with the Lord, so that you can also praise Him properly! May we then also sing, as David in verse 8: *"Then I will sing praises to your name forever as I fulfil my vows each day"*.

Prayer: *Lord, thank You for being everywhere. Thank you that there can be no distance that can make you not hear me. Amen.*

Beware of the rat God

Psalm 62:1, 2: *Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress; I will never be shaken.*

We live in a time when people are afraid of silence. Some people turn on the radio or television when they get up in the morning and the last thing they do at night, is to turn it off again. People are afraid of silence. We are caught in a rat race. Like a hamster in a cage, it feels as if we are running on a wheel without making progress at all.

In today's life we often run from one activity to the next and never get fulfilled. Life is a constant rush between cultural organizations, to the children's music lessons and sports. But, even if you win the rat race, you will only remain a rat.

The famous psychologist Carl Jung said that haste is not of the devil, but that it is the devil himself. The tragedy is that we as Christians also so often worship this Rat God of the rat race. It is as if we want to say to the Lord in arrogance: "Yes Lord, if You want to talk to me You are welcome, but then You will have to be able to keep up."

The true God does not let Himself be known and worshiped in a mad rush. He is the God who lets Himself be found in silence. In our text we read, according to another translation: *"Only with God do I find rest, from Him comes my salvation"*.

2021 has started with a bang. Many New Year's resolutions included doing as much as possible. While these things are not necessarily wrong in themselves, they become part of the rat race that lure us away from the God of the Covenant to the Rat God.

Let us rather be like David who says in our text that he finds peace in God. Do not let so many things at work or

at school deprive you of your fellowship with God. Make it your goal to truly reach out to the Lord. Let your quiet time be non-negotiable for you. This is a good place to find God if you are looking for Him. The rat race not only makes us live past God, but it also makes us lose each other. God wants us to seek Him in silence.

Prayer: *Lord, forgive me for worshipping the Rat God so often. Help me to seek You in silence and find rest in You. Amen.*

God blesses us by his presence

Psalm 67: 1: *May God be merciful and bless us. May his face smile with favour on us.*

I read a while ago on the online news channel *Christian News Now* that witchcraft, occult activities, and the worship of Satan are increasing with leaps and bounds in the USA. According to them, there are currently more worshipers of Satan in the US than there are members of the Presbyterian Church. Someone says that there is enough suffering in a single street in London to prove that God does not exist.

Yet a few weeks ago we celebrated Christmas, commemorating that God became man and came to live among us. We must live out the fact that God is truly Immanuel. The theme of this meditation is precisely this: God blesses us through His presence.

Psalm 67 was part of the worship services held during Jewish religious festivals, such as the Feast of Tabernacles. It is a prayer in which, in the first place, the believers thanked God that they were already blessed by Him. Secondly, they also asked for further blessings. In Numbers 6: 24-26, the Lord instructed the priests to bless the people.

Psalm 67:1 is very similar to that blessing: "May God have mercy on us and bless us, may He appear to our salvation". The last two verses, verses 6, 7 acknowledge that God has already blessed them. There we read: "*The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.*"

God's presence is therefore the core of His blessing - the fact that He is with us. We therefore also confess today, a few weeks after Christmas, that the core of God's blessing revolves around His "being here". His presence is summed up at Christmas in His Name Immanuel - *God with us*. He wants to bless us in what we are doing every day. At work, at school, when we wash dishes and make beds.

In 1918, after the First World War, the German king was dismissed. When his letter of resignation was presented to him, he said: "Then you struggle on your own". Our King did not do that. He did not just leave us to fend for ourselves. No, with Christmas we commemorated and celebrated how He became Immanuel, God with us to

bless us in our daily lives. Yes, the core of His blessing is seated in His presence

Prayer: *Lord, thank you very much for coming to earth and that we can experiencing your presence as the blessing with which you bless us. Amen.*

The church is a torch God wants to use

Psalm 67:2: *May your ways be known throughout the earth, your saving power among people everywhere.*

In Psalm 67:3-5 all nations and peoples are constantly mentioned. This prayer is about deepening and broadening the experience of God's blessing. It is about the other nations sharing in God's blessing. The blessing of the Lord is too much for us to consume. His blessing overflows us and passes on to all the people of the earth.

John Calvin said that every time God blessed His people, He lit a torch with which He wanted to illuminate the whole world. With that, Calvin wanted to say that God had always blessed His children in such abundance that the blessing had to flow to the surrounding nations.

When we celebrated Christmas, we celebrated God as Immanuel; that He is *with us*. But there are so many people who do not know about Him yet. It is becoming more and more urgent that we go out and tell others about God's blessing and God's presence.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas we regularly heard the hit song from Boney M, *Mary's Boy Child* in stores. In it they sing, among other things: "*Let the people shout it, let everyone know, there is hope for all to find peace*". This is what we need to do. We must carry the message of salvation with enthusiasm. We get the opportunity to make Christmas *Christianing feast*.

The American Civil War of 160 years ago, arose over the difference of opinion about the liberation of the slaves. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, as the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. It stipulated that all slaves in America would be free.

However, means of communication at that time were not so good. The result was that in certain places in America, years after the liberation of the slaves, there were still people in slavery, simply because the message of the liberation never reached them.

Today, there are millions of people around the world who are still trapped in the bondage of sin because the message that Jesus Christ is the Saviour has never reached them. We must take that message to them.

Prayer: *Lord, motivate us to bring the message of freedom to the world now, more than ever. Amen.*

🌸 Thanks, God is so different than us!

Psalm 78:3,4: ... things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

The words "tell the next generation" that we find in our text are not just a history lesson. No, in the end, this story tells something about the character of God and about the character of God's children. With this look back into history Asaph concludes: Thank you that God is so different from us!

This Psalm tells in great detail how the people of Israel were unfaithful to God. In verse 17, for example, it says: "But they kept on sinning against Him ...". In verse 8 we also read: "These were a rebellious and disobedient people, an unstable generation that was not faithful to God". So here is the idea that God's children did not stay faithful. As time went on, they slackened in their devotion.

So, it is about people who began to follow God, but who did not calculate the cost. When things get tough, they fade in their devotion. When people go on holiday, they are usually excited about the trip ahead. They leave in good spirit. They are not out of town yet, then the sandwiches are taken out. But as the road gets longer, they become quieter and the road becomes more tiring. Through the hot Karoo, the kids are fighting over anything.

Often things are the same with faith. People often begin the journey of faith with zeal but fade later. They are no longer as faithful to God as they were in the beginning. Do you still remember how much you loved the Lord when you first came to know Him? Can you remember with what zeal you served Him? How was His love burning in your heart? And now? What has become of your dedication?

God tells us today, "Do not just start well. Keep going with it." Do not let your hardships diminish your faithfulness. Do not let sin distract you from God. Stay faithful!

Prayer: Lord, I confess that I have faded in my devotion to You. Help me to serve You today with greater commitment and fire. Amen.

🌸 God is Almighty

Psalm 78:18,19: They stubbornly tested God in their hearts, demanding the foods they craved. They even spoke God Himself, saying, God can't give us food in the wilderness".

Our text today wants to emphasize to us that God is omnipotent. Some time ago a member brought me a book written by a well-known theologian who is also a member of our church. Amazingly, in this book he

makes a big deal out of the fact that God is not omnipotent. He says that it is true that God has power and can do many things, but that He is certainly not omnipotent. The Israelites, according to our text, made the same mistake.

They argued: "This situation is impossible. Yes, perhaps in the promised land, the land overflowing with milk and honey, there God can provide for us. But here in the desert? No way! Surely we cannot expect that from God!"

It is true that God is not a magician who has to perform the tricks we ask for. Our heavenly Father is also not Santa Claus who has to give us everything on our wish list. However, we must also realize that God is omnipotent. There is nothing He cannot do. There is nothing that is difficult for Him. Even when I am, so to speak, in the wilderness, there is nothing that restricts God.

Where there is no help for me, no advice, no plan left, no more tears to cry, there is still God. My end is not His end. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning, and the End, the First and the Last. He is the One who is and who was. He is the One who will come again. He is the Almighty. (Revelation 1: 8)

He can change any situation. He can change anyone. What a God-dishonouring question we find in verse 19: "Can God provide food here in the wilderness?"

Prayer: Lord, what a reassurance it is that You are truly omnipotent. That You can really give us food in the desert. That You are not subject to circumstances. Amen

🌸 God is a God who forgives

Psalm 78:38: Yet He was merciful and forgave their sins and did not destroy them all. Many times, He held back His anger and did not unleash His fury.

In Psalm 78 we often read about man's sin. The examples are too many to mention, but in verse 17 we read, for example that they kept on sinning against Him; in the wilderness they rebelled against the Most High. In verse 32 we read, according to another translation: "Yet they continued to sin and His miracles did not tell them anything". Thus, we read that God does good to His people, that He cares for them, but they respond to His goodness with rebellion. And now we may think that He must therefore wipe them off the globe in the blink of an eye. But that's not how God is.

Despite all this disobedience and rebellion, we read that God still cares for them. In verse 25 we read, for example, "Everyone ate of this bread from heaven. God sent them more than enough food". In verse 38 we also read how God responds to this rebellion and disobedience when it says, "Yet He was merciful and forgave their sins and did not destroy them all. Many times, He held back His anger and did not unleash His fury."

Does it mean that we can carry on sinning as we like? No, not at all. God does not let us make fun of Him. But God's actions tell us something about Him. It says that He is so different from us. He could impatiently leave the Israelites to their own fate. But we read that He forgives; that He still cares. What a comfort it is for us. We who often fade in our devotion. We who rebel, we who disobey, we who despise God's gifts.

If God acted in anger and in vengeance, every time we disobeyed Him, who of us would exist for a moment? Thank the Lord, that He is so different from us. Thank Him for His love and infinite grace.

Psalms 78 gives us a glimpse of us as human beings today. We who so soon fade concerning our faithfulness, fade concerning our zeal. We who so easily doubt God's omnipotence.

Psalms 78 tells us that fortunately God is completely different. Thank Him for enduring and carrying us. Thank Him that He loves us despite our rebellion. Thank Him for being so gracious. Thank Him that He is so different from us.

Prayer: *Lord, thank You for enduring and carrying us. Thank You for loving us despite our rebellion. Thank You for being gracious. Thank You for being so different from us. Amen.*

God gives you a new future

Psalm 85:1: *You, LORD, showed favour to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.*

Maybe you also heard the story of the person who was driving and then saw two women walking along the road who were carrying luggage on their heads. He stopped and offered them a lift. They climbed onto the back of the bakkie and after driving a long way, he realized that they were still holding the parcels on their heads. He explained to them that they could just take the parcels off their heads and that they could put them on the bakkie, because the bakkie carries them and their parcels anyway. However, they refused and kept the parcels on their heads.

We often deal with God in the same way. He offers to carry us, but then we also still want to carry our own parcels. Sometimes it is our worries that keep us going, even though God says, "Give it to Me. I will carry it for you". Sometimes it is our sins. Sins that God has already forgiven, that we still cherish and cannot accept that God has forgiven me.

This Psalm speaks of God's goodness. It speaks of God giving His children a new future. They were trapped in an old life of sin and trial. Hopeless and miserable with a future that has lost its appeal. Their present and past paralyzed them. A present and a past where people paid with blood and sweat and tears, without getting bread and milk for it. A past that left them exhausted due to temptations and trials and guilt they bore.

And in this situation God gives his children a new future, because God says to them: "I carry you. Let me therefore bear your burdens. Let me also bear your worries and your guilt".

Maybe today you can associate with the people of Israel. Maybe you are also tired and exhausted because of your past that you are carrying so heavily. Don't you want to leave it in God's hands too? Do not be like those women who sit on the truck and still carry the load themselves. Leave it to God. He carries you anyway. He also wants to give you a new future.

Prayer: *Lord, thank You for giving me a new future. Help me to leave every burden in Your hands and delight me in the fact that You carry me. Amen.*

Forgiveness comes at a price

Psalm 85:2: *You forgave the guilt of your people – yes, you covered all their sins.*

Our text tells us that the forgiveness of sins comes at a price. A price God paid with the blood of His Son on the cross. In Psalm 85:3 we read: "You have taken away the iniquity of Your people, ...".

The well-known preacher and commentator, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, says in this regard: "God, being God, cannot simply forgive sin ... if God could have forgiven sin by saying, 'I forgive,' He would have done so, and Christ would never have been sent into this world. The work that was given to Him to do, was given to the Lord Jesus Christ because without it, God cannot forgive sin". The forgiveness of sins is therefore accompanied by a price. The blood of the Son of God.

Another very important message that the whole Scripture brings to us is that our sins can never be forgiven only partially. Our sin is either not forgiven at all, or it is totally forgiven. There is an interesting distinction between the way the New Testament and the Old Testament look at sin. In the New Testament, sin is portrayed as a power that binds you. Something that is in control of you, something that leads to negative behaviour.

In the Old Testament it is different. Sin is portrayed as a weight that weighs heavily on you. As a burden that slows you down and pulls you down. Something that gets too heavy for you, so it drives you into the ground. Therefore, forgiveness in the Old Testament also carries the picture of God who removes this weight of sin that has become too heavy for you, that drives you into the ground. He comes to lift the burden off your shoulders.

Our text says that He has taken away the iniquity of His people. In Hebrew, the word that is used for "taken away", means to *pick up* or *lift*. It literally says that God, by forgiving His people, lifted the sin away from them, that He bore it for them. He lifted and took away their sin, which drove them into the ground. Our text is translated in *The Message* as: "God, you smiled on your good earth! You brought good times back to Jacob! You lifted

the cloud of guilt from your people, you put their sins far out of sight”.

Do you not want to give your life to the Lord today? Do you not want to experience how God, by grace, lifts the burden of sin from your shoulders?

Prayer: *Lord, I lay my sin at Your feet. Will you please lift the heavy burden from my shoulders and carry it for me? For now, and forever. Amen.*

Forgiveness: Everything or nothing at all

Psalm 65:2,3: *All of us must come to you. Though we are overwhelmed by our sins, you forgive them all.*

Sin is cruel. Sin also has the germ of self-destruction in it. In James 1:15 we read: *"Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death"*. My prayer for you today is that when you go to God in repentance, that you will experience how God lifts that burden of sin, this weight off your shoulders, as we also read in Psalm 85: 3 yesterday. That you will experience the freedom from that burden that pulls you down to the ground.

The one problem we have is the fact that we do not always realize the seriousness of our sin. The other problem, which is just as real, is that we do not always realize that God completely forgives us. In repentance we ask God for forgiveness, but we never leave it with Him. We cannot believe that God truly forgives us completely. For example, in Psalm 103:9,12 we read: *"He will not hold us accountable for our sin, nor will we be angry forever ... As far as the east is from the west, so far will He remove our transgressions from us"*.

In Micah 7:19 we read: *"He will show us mercy again, He will destroy our sin. You will cast all their sins into the deep sea"*. Our text today, Psalm 65:2, 3 also says, *"All of us must come to you. Though we are overwhelmed by our sins, you forgive them all"*.

Is there a sin you have been wondering about for a long time? Something you may have done wrong, something you did to offend God or someone else, and you have often asked God for forgiveness, know that God has already forgiven you. God wants to tell you today, "Go out here today as a free person!" God wants to take that burden off your shoulders.

God says in Psalm 85:3, He wants to lift that sin from you. He wants to pick it up. He wants to carry it for you. God says to you today: "You have been completely forgiven. Go on with your life as a redeemed child of God. Go live your status as a saint wherever you go".

Do not think about that sin again, because God no longer thinks about it. Go on with your life! God bears it, so you need no longer.

Prayer: *Thank You Lord for not forgiving us partially, but completely. Help me to accept it and to go on with my life as an acquittal. Amen*

God's care

Psalm 90:1,2: *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

This Psalm is the oldest of all the Psalms. It was written by Moses and is a few hundred years older than the other Psalms. He wrote it at the end of his life. He stands at a point where he looks back, but simultaneously also looks ahead. And in these moments, he first thinks of God - how almighty God is. But then he also thinks of man's vanity.

In our text we see how Moses first thinks of God's omnipotence and care. Moses honours God for leading and preserving them as a people. He is the One who led them out of Egypt and divided the Reed Sea so that they could pass on dry ground. He gave them manna and quail when they were hungry.

In Deuteronomy 8:4,15, Moses tells the people how the Lord preserved them through the wilderness. He says, *"In forty years your clothes did not wear out, and your feet did not swell. It is He who caused you to pass through this great and dangerous desert full of poisonous snakes and scorpions, it is He who caused you to flow water out of the rock-hard rock into this arid land without water and made you eat manna in the desert, ..."*. Moses would also have fully realized in the wilderness how insignificant man really is. None of those who left Egypt reached the Promised Land.

In South Africa we also look back on a unique year where we sometimes did well and sometimes very badly. A year where the whole world was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. A year where we reached peaks but also deep lows. How life stood with its back to us; how we experienced bitter disappointments. We think back to the sadness and pain we had to endure. Looking back, we can easily see God's faithfulness. How He carried us and gave us manna from heaven and water from a rock. He was always faithful and carried us. May this faithfulness of God also stand out to you today.

Prayer: *Lord, today we look back on many trials. Help us to see Your care and faithfulness amid the trials and that your care will stand out for us. Amen.*

We are God's blessed ones

Psalm 90:17: *LORD our God, may your blessings be with us. Give us success in all we do! (Good News Bible)*

Yesterday this Psalm showed that Moses was simultaneously looking forward and backward. When he looked at the terrible trials they went through, he also saw the faithfulness and care of the Lord who carried them. We

can also look back on a previous year filled with severe trials, a year dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, we can also look back in gratitude on the fact that the Lord has taken care of us.

What did Moses do when he looked back in the past and looked to the future? As someone who has already experienced God's blessing, he prays in dependence for God's continued blessing. In verse 17 he prays: "LORD our God, may your blessings be with us. Give us success in all we do". Those of us who are also looking back on an extremely challenging year, what will we do?

Will I put my trust in my bank accounts, in my good position at work or in the good spouse or family I have? Will I put my trust in my friends or in my mental abilities? No, let us who have already been blessed by God pray for God's continued blessing. I do not want to be in any other hands than in the pierced hands of the Lord Jesus. I do not want to entrust myself to any other prince than to the King of Kings.

Following our text, we who look back can only say: thank you, sorry and please. Thank you, Lord, for being faithful again in the past year. Thank you, Lord, because everything was grace. Sorry Lord that we have disappointed You so often. Sorry Lord, that we have hurt so many people. Forgive us this. Please Lord, carry us. Please Lord, bless us again, you who have always blessed us.

In Exodus 33:15, Moses says to the Lord, "If you do not go with us, do not let us go from here." That is all we can say to the Lord: "Lord, if You do not go with us, nothing is worthwhile. We are totally dependent on You".

Prayer: Psalm 90:17: *Let us experience the goodness of the Lord our God: keep the work of our hands, yes, the work of our hands, keep it. Amen.*

Sing a song to the Lord

Psalm 92:1-3: *It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. (NIV)*

From an early age, you teach your child to say thank you for something. The child is not yet able to speak properly, then one starts to tell him or her to say thank you. But I do not know if the human brain is very receptive to the word "thank you", because it looks like a lost battle you are fighting.

We do not actually fare better in our relationship with our heavenly Father. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, the Lord says, "Be thankful in all circumstances." But that doesn't happen frequently. We often hear that God has saved us by grace. We hear about the price Jesus had to pay for it. How can we then but thank the Lord for it? In our text we read: "It is good to praise the Lord, to sing Your name, Most High, to testify of Your

love every morning, and to be faithful every night of Your faith, to do so with stringed instruments...".

The Lord loves music and singing. Just after the exodus from Egypt, the people praised the Lord with a song of praise. At the dedication of the temple, music was made with many musical instruments to the glory of the Lord. With Christ's birth the angels sing. In the book of Revelation, we read of the new song being sung. Yes, God loves it that we thank Him through music and song for His goodness to us, that we honour Him through it.

There are two dangers associated with this thanking through music and singing. The first danger is that we do not pay attention to what we sing. We do not sing with enthusiasm. We sing "Praise the Lord", but we no longer realize what we are singing.

The other danger is to sing God's praises simply because we enjoy it. Of course, it should also be fun to glorify God through song. However, if we sing just because it is fun, then we have once again put ourselves in the centre of our relationship with God. Nor is it true praise and worship. Let us use our singing opportunities during worship services to truly honour God.

Prayer: *Lord we honour You for all Your goodness. Help us to truly have Your honour in mind with every hymn we sing. Help us to sing in such a way that You enjoy it more than we do. Amen.*

We thank God through our prayers

Psalm 92:5-8: *How great are your works, LORD, how profound your thoughts! Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. But you, LORD, are forever exalted.*

We read yesterday from the same Psalm how important it is to sing to the glory of the Lord. How important it is to thank the Lord with music. Today we see that we also thank God through our prayers.

In our text we read how the Psalmist breaks out in a prayer of praise to God. We read it again: "How great are your works, LORD, how profound your thoughts! Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. But you, LORD, are forever exalted."

One of our church's confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism, also mentions that prayer is the most important part of our life of gratitude. Every believer's life runs in the pattern of sin, salvation and gratitude. You are born a sinner, who is then redeemed by God by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. And then, out of gratitude, you live a life that glorifies Him. This gratitude includes so-called good works we do, thereby thanking God for our salvation.

Of all these so-called good works, prayer is the most important way to thank God. We can actually say that prayer is the barometer of our gratitude for our salvation. If you truly realize what Christ has done for you, if you truly realize the price He paid on the cross for your sin, you will heartily pray out of gratitude.

We could deduce from this that someone who does not pray has not really realized what Christ's sacrifice entailed, or that he realizes it, yet is not grateful. We need to be jealous of our prayer life. It is so easy to fall into prayerlessness. While we are often reminded of the great price Christ paid for our sins, let us regularly thank the Lord for our salvation. Let us thank Him for the expensive price He paid on our behalf.

Prayer: *Lord, it is such a wonderful privilege to be able to be allowed to talk to You. It's actually amazing that we can so easily put this privilege aside and neglect it. Help us to realize anew that this is a wonderful opportunity that we should not neglect. Amen.*

Grateful people attend church services

Psalm 92:12,13: *The righteous will be strong as palm trees, like the tall cedars of Lebanon. They find their strength in the house of the Lord and grow up in the temple of our God.*

In the two lessons from Psalm 92 we saw that praise and music are ways to thank God. We have also seen that prayer is a very important way to thank God. Psalm 92 says that attending worship services is also a way of thanking God: *"The righteous will be strong as palm trees, like tall cedars in Lebanon. They find their strength in the house of the Lord and grow up in the temple of our God."*

It is true that God does not live in an earthly temple, nor is the church building His house. We often speak incorrectly of the church building as the "House of the Lord". We ourselves are the temple of the Lord and He dwells in us through His Holy Spirit.

Attending worship services is also part of our life of gratitude. We go to church (to use the term incorrectly) in the first place to thank the Lord. People sometimes say: "I do not go to church, because I do not gain anything there anyway". It is so that one also wants to get something out of a church service, that one wants to be enriched and strengthened by it. But you are not going to church to get something primarily, you are going to say thank you for what you have already got.

People are often spiritual gluttons. They want and have more without even saying thank you for what they have already received. Worship attendance is actually a way of thanking the Lord for our salvation and for all the blessings we have already received from His hand.

We have seen through the meditations from Psalm 92 that we can give thanks to the Lord through song. Prayer is the most important part of our life of gratitude. Attending worship services is also a measure of our gratitude for our salvation. Let us live out our gratitude in the day ahead.

Prayer: *Thank you very much Lord that we have the privilege of attending worship services with other believers. Thank you for feeding and strengthening and encouraging us there. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to thank you. Amen.*

God remembers I am made of dust

Psalm 103: 2,14: *I will praise the Lord, and will not forget any of his benefits ... He keeps in mind that we are dust.*

When one looks at fairy tales, it is striking how good and evil are set against each other. The one who plays the role of evil is always a despot who expects the impossible from the good one. Just think of the story of Cinderella where her stepmother and step-sisters expect the impossible from her. She has to clean the house, scrub the floors and wash the dishes while the others are going from one party to another.

In the story of Rumpelstiltskin, it is depicted even better. First, the greedy king expects the poor miller's daughter to spin a room full of golden straw in the middle of the night. Fortunately, a gnome comes to her rescue. The second impossibility demanded of her is that he wants her child just after he would be born. When her child is born, he demands the child. He gives her three days to guess what his name is, in order to keep her child that way. This is the third case that is impossible, because who would have ever guessed that his name was Rumpelstiltskin?

This is often how we look at God: a despot who expects the impossible from us. He is a tyrant who errs in thinking that I am the mighty one who can keep standing under these circumstances. But what is the truth? Verse 14 of Psalm 103 says: *"He knows what we are made of, He keeps in mind that we are dust"*. God does not expect the impossible from us. He knows we are weak and fragile.

When Paul complains to the Lord about the thorn in his flesh, God says, *"My grace is sufficient for you!"* He says, *"Yes, Paul, I know that this matter is too heavy for you, therefore I give you the grace to bear it"*. Let us not, therefore, degrade God to a despot who expects the impossible from us. He keeps in mind that we are made of dust. David says in verse 2: *"I will praise the Lord and will not forget any of His benefits"*. He does not want to forget the good that God has given him and the good that God has done for him.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you so much for remembering that I am only made of dust. Thank You for not expecting the impossible from me, but for accomplishing the impossible for me. Amen.*

Finding your Place in this World

By Mrs Roxanne Bailey, Career Guidance Counsellor, Independent Psychometrist and Pastoral Counsellor

"This one will say, 'I am the LORD'S';
And that one will call on the name of Jacob;
And another will write on his hand, 'Belonging to the LORD,'
And will name Israel's name with honour."
- Isaiah 44:5

Introduction

My own vision or dream, when I am quiet and think of 'My Place in this World'. Standing in nature, on a vast open plain surrounded by peacefulness and calm, overseeing a cascading waterfall with the adjacent sounds of the different bird life and insects. The ascendancy of nature's colours is immediately soaked in. Dressed in white, one approaches the serene golden-illuminating light of carefreeness.

In the distance there is a hanging swing in a deep-rooted tree (My Willow Tree), standing almost in a position of ease. The hanging swing is covered in the most beautiful flowers, with the most alluring smell. No ordinary smell... it is not bitter, nor sweet. Something one cannot fathom. More than a smell, but almost as though one uses all one's senses in a unique harmony of tranquil symphonies of wonder.

This young woman's dreams are her soul's pillar of faith, the strength that keeps her inner flame alit... with the ever-present guidance from GOD and her family as her earthly Angels of kindness, hope, as well as love. A search for belonging in a world full of bruises. Have you ever felt different: not belonging in this world?

I have... during my youth. I was the one getting belittled by others, since of obeying the rules, standing by my good values instilled by my parents, as well as trying to always care about others and being honest. This set me on a path of Psychology and the inner need to attentive listening, as well as to make a small difference, and guide where I can. However, as a deep-thinker and spiritual individual... faith and family have always pulled me through, and Psychology gave me certain human tools to use.

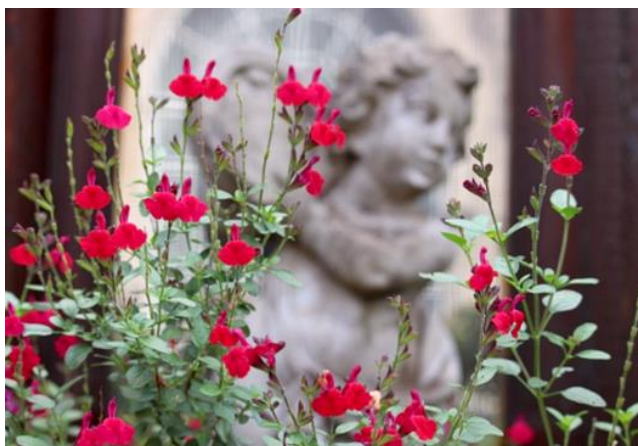
A few verses from Josh Wilson's song, OK:

"Bring your broken heart
Your secrets and your scars



You were never meant to carry all this weight
Let your walls come down
And let the tears fall out
And know that Jesus loves you just the same
It's ok not to be ok
It's ok not to be ok
It's ok
It's ok not to be ok"

The last few verses repeats: 'It's ok not to be ok'. God created each one with a purpose, although sometimes one finds oneself lost. We are ever seeking beings created perfectly by God as stated within the following verse in Ephesians 2:10 – "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." We find ourselves as travellers.



I find myself travelling in my inner self, along a pathway leading towards a mature 'Willow Tree'. One notices its roots and start to follow it. As in life, we might find a small footpath while hiking, pause slightly and then spend a few minutes in inner thought..., where might this path take one..., how long might this footpath be? What then is purpose? What is my place in this world?

Grace

According to the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), these trees are: "graceful semi-deciduous to evergreen tree grows up to 15 m with an open crown and slightly drooping branches. Older trees have fissured, brown bark, while younger trees have smooth, green-red bark."

To find oneself as 'graceful'. This is the purpose for me as Counsellor. To first find yourself to be as graceful as a 'Willow Tree'; before one can whole-heartedly assist another.

Grace's meaning from a biblical perspective (bible tool): "describes grace as the unmerited favour of God toward man. In the Old Testament, the term that most often is translated "grace," is *chen* [ej]; in the New Testament, it is *charis* [cavri]." Furthermore, it is seen as a divine kindness, or an act of true compassion on the part of God Himself toward needy and undeserving human recipients (Christianity.com).

Dr J. Vines (2008), exclaims, the following: “it is always grace and then peace, because that’s God’s approach to the soul. God always meets us in grace before we can experience His peace. Joy is a product of grace; grace does not come from joy.”

If one really listens more deeply to this meaning from J Vines (2008) one can denote the brilliance of purpose not laid before use in earthly joy, which in our human world we all might at times feel as being His ‘Grace’ for us. Yet we need to overcome personal hurdles in our own life’s ‘Willow Tree’. We need to walk along the roots of our tree to find Him. When we do, this will be the ‘gracefulness’ received. The soil, nutrients and sunlight to our ‘Willow Tree’s’ roots.

Finding your place in this world...

Let us consider the life of one ‘Willow Tree’ who endured a lot. V E Frankl (1992) was born in September of 1942. Dr C G Boeree (2006) describes Viktor Frankl’s life’s Willow Tree in the follow significantly summarised way:

“This young doctor, his new bride, his mother, father, and brother, were arrested in Vienna and taken to a concentration camp in Bohemia. It was events that occurred there and at three other camps that led the young doctor – prisoner – to realize the significance of meaningfulness in life. One of the earliest events to drive home the point was the loss of a manuscript – his life’s work – during his transfer to Auschwitz. He had sewn it into the lining of his coat but was forced to discard it at the last minute. He spent many later nights trying to reconstruct it, first in his mind, then on slips of stolen paper.

Another significant moment came while on a predawn march to work on laying railroad tracks: Another prisoner wondered out loud about the fate of their wives.

The young doctor began to think about his own wife and realized that she was present within him: The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. And throughout his ordeal, he could not help but see that, among those given a chance for survival, it was those who held on to a vision of the future – whether it be a significant task before



them, or a return to their loved ones – that were most likely to survive their suffering. It would be, in fact, the meaningfulness that could be found in suffering itself that would most impress him: (T)here is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behaviour: namely, in man’s attitude to his existence, and existence restricted by external forces.... Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.”

Looking at Viktor Frankl’s ‘Willow Tree’, his tree withstood many endless sufferings, yet he found ‘Grace’, thus true self-actualisation. Viktor Frankl lost his wife, his unborn child was aborted by the Nazi’s, lost his mother, father and brother. Then his manuscript he worked on, during the time spend at Auschwitz, got lost. Yet, his ‘Willow Tree’ did not give up. He grew in his spirit and closeness towards God.

P Sarkany (2004) refers to the follow statement by Viktor Emil Frankl: “Religion is not about ensuring the accomplishment of a relaxed life conduct, or the lack of conflict or some other psycho-hygienic objective. Religion offers more to human being than psychotherapy; and indeed, expects more from her or him.” With enough space, good care and soil, a young willow can develop a healthy trunk and root system. Since the roots can spread from the trunk in different directions of 12 metres. Just like this ‘Willow Tree’ many things can happen in our lives, which spread our life roots in different directions. Furthermore, ‘Willow Trees’ can endure natural hurdles such as pests. In life we may endure different forms of ‘pests’- emotional, mental, physical or financial hurdles.

Furthermore, W F Ryan (2019) describes Viktor Frankl’s view of God, as well as in finding his place in this world - amongst all the physical, emotional, and mental suffering experienced- during the time of being within the concentration camp at Auschwitz, in the following way:

“The unconscious God can become the “God consciously known” at any time or place. One of the seemingly paradoxical ideas of Man’s Search for Meaning is that God can be found even in a concentration camp. This paradox clarifies Frankl’s belief that God is present at any time and any

place whether sought by individuals or worshiping communities. He holds that the unconscious God is neither remote nor frequently inoperative, but rather is always present. It is through their acts of meaning that persons can always consciously look for God and find God."

God is always present; He is our Creator of our Place in this World. Viktor Frankl endured many unbearable deep sufferings; however, He found His Place in this World through the 'Grace', God revealed within His life. No one has the same 'Grace'; however, the constant is, God, who brings us salvation.

Conclusion

A children story that I have read to my young daughter from the English Stories App, is about a 'Little Boy's Meeting with God'- in summary, in my own words:

'This little boy knew that the trip to find God would be a long one, so he packed lunch for himself and started his journey. He met a lady sitting in the park who stared at pigeons. As he went to sit next to her, he noted that the old lady looked hungry and so offered her something to eat and drink. The old lady gratefully accepted the refreshments. She smiled so beautifully... now this smile delighted the young boy, they never had to utter a word amongst them... yet this smile taught him something. That God was within this smile of this old lady, thus when sharing our happiness and kindness is all someone might need. Ultimately, God is Everywhere if we just want to listen with our whole self.'

Each 'Willow Tree' just like myself, needs guidance. I also felt different during my youth and that I did not belong, in this world. This world, this place on earth, did not make sense and it always seemed as though I did not fit in. I am a person who reflects, always have deep thoughts and very connected to my inner self, as well as always want to see the good in someone; trusting and having faith in the good in every person - sometimes got hurt and misused by some, and learned that everyone is not always as 'good'.

Nonetheless, this is my innate self- 'to care and have faith in the good of others'. Proverbs 16:1 says: "The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD." God has a place for each one of us if we really and truly start to listen attentively with our whole self.

Michael W Smith wrote "Place in This World" about our search for our way in this world, but his song also indicates God's wonderful Grace on our journey:

The wind is moving
But I am standing still
A life of pages
Waiting to be filled
A heart that's hopeful
A head that's full of dreams
But this becoming
Is harder than it seems
Feels like

Chorus:

I'm looking for a reason
Roaming through the night to find
My place in this world
My place in this world
Not a lot to lean on
I need Your light to help me find
My place in this world
My place in this world

If there are millions
Down on their knees
Among the many
Can you still hear me?
Hear me asking
Where do I belong?
Is there a vision
That I can call my own?
Show me...

Furthermore, having faith and support from wonderful parents during my youth; set me on my path towards my own 'Grace', that God wanted for my 'Willow Tree'- to grow and flourish with strength, as well as the knowledge that He will provide me with the care, to qualitatively guide others.

If we do everything through His, Grace, He will strengthen us, and He will never forsake His children; as He states within Matthew 6:26: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Dear 'Willow Tree', you have a Place in this World; moreover, you will always have a Place with God through Jesus Christ who gave His life for all of us. ■

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Notes from the CPSC office

Dear CPSC affiliate

The December holidays has come and gone, followed by the very fast paced first three months of 2021.

After a COVID-19 contact scare and a period of self-quarantine during the “holidays”, where not a single one of our carefully set holiday plans could be executed, we are thankfully all still healthy and back on the working track.

February 2021 also marked my 4-year anniversary with CPSC. This has been one of the busiest, but also most rewarding stretches of my whole life.

Being a nursing sister, I was accustomed to working hard and reaping the benefits of a profession that gives back as much as it demands of you.

Working with the amazing CPSC affiliates, I have been burning the candle on both ends - totally accustomed to the term “midnight oil” - I have never in my life experienced a more rewarding flipside of the working coin!

I wish to thank each and every affiliate for the continuing support and I can honestly say that I have never in any previous position experienced this much kindness, cooperation and appreciation. You have become an inseparable part of my life and I am really so thankful for the quality you add to my daily living.

Welcome

CPSC has grown with leaps and bounds and I want to extend a hearty welcome to all our new affiliates in our midst. When SAAP evolved into CPSC at the end of



2017, we had 383 excited, though slightly apprehensive SAAP members joining us as CPSC affiliates on the newly paved CPSC road with ACRP as our Professional Body.

I have now registered affiliate number 796 and I have 10 more new applicants whose applications have already been evaluated and who will soon complete their registrations.

We will then be passing the 800 mark within days and I am personally very excited about the renewed interest, need and passion of pastoral counsellors to formalise their professional status by registering with CPSC as part of ACRP.

A linked registered scope of practice

The concept of a linked registered scope of practice to an awarded level of registration has now become a familiar term.

This concept provides secure guidelines and set borders to counsellors in practice and all the other levels of pastoral counselling and care.

This serves to protect both the counsellor and the public, as it creates a safe environment and structure within which the counsellor or pastoral caregiver can function.

I want to thank the people who contributed to this edition of our newsletter and want to extend the invitation to all to contribute articles for our future editions.

As always kind regards and warm wishes,

Anita ■



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