

Inspiration from
Word for the
week –
volume 4

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Although written for an audience of people at work, the inspiration contained herein is applicable to all areas of the spirit filled Christian life.

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Trouble in the marketplace

There are various issues coming to the forefront, all of which will affect us day to day in the future.

- 1) Inflation is now on the increase as a result of the huge amount of 'money' pumped into the world's economies as a stimulus to revive trade after the pandemic. In the end it will benefit the well off at the expense of the poor.
- 2) Climate change is having its effect. As the scripture says, 'Fires goes before the Lord,' we see that on an increasing scale. Extensive damage. Relentless storms and floods – extensive damage, and so on. (Refer to Matthew 24:3-14)
- 3) Unstable relationships between nations are going to increase affecting trade.
- 4) Corruption is endemic in many countries. Everywhere there is increasing defiance of that which is righteous – often promoted by governments.
- 5) Pressure in many economies is likely to see interest rates rise, taxes rise and maybe even the confiscation by governments of bank balances as in Malta and Zimbabwe for example.

How do we pursue life and business when the going gets even tougher?

Jesus described His disciples as sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16-23) with the warning of great opposition. In many countries there is great opposition now whilst in many we are having a relatively easy time.

We are to be alert to times getting tougher.

The Lord has provided us with a toolbox of spiritual tools:

- a) The blood of Jesus which has cleansed, redeemed and justified us, giving us peace with God.
- b) Encourage ourselves and others – *‘speak to yourself (and others) in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.’* Ephesians 5:19-20
- c) Scripture which profitable for doctrine, reproof (testing what is right), for correction and for instruction in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16 And good for making proclamations.
- d) His voice and the leading of the Holy Spirit to assist us on our way.
- e) The invitation to the throne of grace to seek help in times of need through prayer. Hebrews 4:16.
- f) The ability to resist all the works of the enemy and the discernment to know when he is at work.

So encouraged and strengthened by dwelling on these things and putting them into practice, we are ready and thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17) Now we walk forward trusting the Lord implicitly and listening for His direction.

It is through faith that we can overcome the world and the enemy. That faith is made up of two elements - the element of trust and the element that comes by hearing God speak. (Romans 10:17) Get that tool box working!

What more can we say? *‘Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves’* James 1:22 and *‘Do not cast away your confidence which has great reward’* Hebrews 10:35 Whatever comes to pass our eternal inheritance is guaranteed and is wonderful beyond our imagining.

The Creator's tools

Have you ever considered God's toolbox? – it contains wisdom, understanding and knowledge. By these tools God founded the earth, the heavens and the depths and clouds. Proverbs 3:19-20

Let's start and incline our ears to wisdom. It is like the big picture, the overall scheme of things. God's wisdom has a plan for each one of us – *'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.'* Ephesians 2:10 That is God's wisdom. Our wisdom would be - be sure to walk in that which God prepared for me. The world's wisdom would be to ignore Him altogether! By wisdom He founded the earth.

Having decided to follow wisdom the good book then urges us to apply our hearts to understanding - that is how things work and work together. Now this is sometimes difficult for us – often we just don't comprehend. Fortunately the Lord has provided a wonderful helper – the same One who was there at creation. The Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth and open our eyes to understand - we call that revelation. He, the Holy Spirit is so important to the working out of God's plan for us that the apostle Paul urges us to walk in the Spirit. Romans 8:4. Galatians 5:16 The alternative is to walk in the flesh - that is after our own thoughts and desires and not after the calling of the Lord. By understanding He established the heavens - which are essential to life on earth.

The third element the Lord used was knowledge. This is the more detailed aspect. 'This bit is shaped like this and fits exactly together with that bit.' This is evidenced extensively in creation where we see the remarkable complexity of things God has made - our human eye is a wonderful example and how the woodpecker does not bash his brains out is down to God's intimate knowledge of design and engineering. His knowledge adds practical details - the water cycle, the depths and the clouds, again essential to life.

Now all these same tools are available to me and to you - wisdom, if you lack it ask for it. James 1:5. The Lord will give us wisdom when we ask.

Understanding - 'Lean not on your own understanding.' Paul urged Timothy to consider what he said - for us that would be consider carefully the scripture - then Paul added, may the Lord give you understanding.

Understanding so that we know what is good and right. Knowledge. Details. The Lord God will supply. He has a special gift to give called 'the word of knowledge.' This is when His Spirit tells or shows you something to your or someone else's advantage.

God's wisdom is love. Man sinned. Understand that a sacrifice was needed to pay the penalty and know that Jesus paid it in full.

'Now grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that you might know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.'

Think soberly

'For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.' Romans 12:3

'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.' 2 Corinthians 4:7

We are very highly privileged people - God has placed His own Spirit in us, an unsurpassable treasure. As we pray, seek and ask the Lord, we rise above just earthly possibilities and expectations. We receive things from heaven - as most Christians can readily testify from their own experience.

It is faith that sets us apart. We were born again when we first trusted (had faith) in Jesus for our salvation. Now we can, as often as we like, approach boldly the throne of grace - that immediately demonstrates our continuing trust in the Lord. Faith comes when He speaks to us with His will and His desires for us.

Trouble comes when we are following our own desires and expect the Lord to give His approval and empowerment. His kingdom does not work like that! In His kingdom He has already prepared the way he has designed for each of us individually. However, freewill being of very great importance, He allows us to go astray if we persist.

Here is the call to think soberly as persisting in our own desires becomes sin and leads to the bringing forth of things from the kingdom of death.

Think God's Kingdom, think servant, think He is Lord and entitled to establish His direction in my life - He bought me with a price. Add to that thought, God's intention for me is good, very good. This is clearly shown by the fact that He promises to bring good out of every situation for us.

Sober thinking establishes in our hearts love for Jesus and love for the truth - because we have settled it in our minds. Jesus love, and the truth are to and will make us complete and equip us for every good work. (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Watch out. There is immense pressure in this day to deny the existence of the risen Jesus and to deny the scripture or to change it - just like the scribes and Pharisees did in Jesus day. (Matthew 15:1-9)

You and I are not God's answer to each and every problem - but we are the answer to any problem when empowered by the Spirit. Without His Spirit we are just earthen vessels - yet His power can emanate from us to an unlimited degree when He gives His word and faith arises. The key - when He speaks to us, gives His specific word. When He gives that word and we receive it then it is up to us to determine the outcome - that is agree with the word and speak it out and see it fulfilled or choose not to and it falls away unfulfilled.

Got the best head gear?

Without doubt the best thing to wear on your head is the helmet of salvation. Salvation having the meaning of being delivered from danger – it applies to both our inheritance in eternity with the Lord, and to our daily walk through life on the earth. Both our spirit and our soul benefit from deliverance from danger!

We don't need to be concerned over the deliverance of our human spirit – that is guaranteed, but we need all the help we can get for our time on earth. 'Work out the salvation of your soul with fear and trembling.'

Paul describes us as 'sons of light' telling us to be sober, to put on the breastplate of righteousness and as a helmet the hope of salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5:5 and 8) Now we need to understand that the biblical word translated 'hope' is an absolute certainty and not a faint hope.

In his letter to the Ephesians (chapter 6, verse 17) Paul lists the helmet of salvation as part of our regular armour. Better make sure we are wearing it! To the Corinthians hope is listed along with faith and love as the three things that will remain. So we see hope is a vital ingredient in the Christian life.

Paul's testimony is that the Lord always leads us in triumph – but that triumph will be severely delayed if we don't have the expectation of being blessed – the expectation that the Lord will surely come to our aid in times of need.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the substance of things hoped for. Hope is the forerunner to faith. When we have that 'certainty of deliverance from danger' then faith comes in as the spiritual substance of things not seen - then follows the actual deliverance. In my family we have seen this process at work many times, with spiritual problems, with practical work problems, when seeking guidance and with relationship problems and so on.

Hope is closely related to confidence in the Lord and in confidence in His written and His spoken word. Hebrews again tells us 'therefore do not cast away your confidence which has great reward, for you have need of endurance so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.' (10:35)

Endurance - we might use a common phrase, 'hang in there.' Just because there seems to be a delay does not mean God has not heard or that there is no answer. James tells us that patience has to do its perfect work in us so that we become fully mature. Endurance and patience go hand in hand. We can describe endurance as patience under pressure. Job in the Old Testament is an example for us - when everything was going wrong for him, and even his friends were giving bad counsel, nevertheless Job stayed faithful and was very richly rewarded.

Let's be like Job in this - that when things are going wrong we don't give up or confidence in the Lord, rather we seek Him knowing He always leads us in triumph.

The business of life

'Beware lest anyone cheat you....' Colossians 2:8 In the world there is a huge increase in fraud and deceit of every type – it's as if the world's business is to cheat anyone it can get access to. Let's consider the particular methods of cheating that Paul warned the Colossians about:

'.... Through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of this world and not according to Christ.' Colossians 2:8

When things go wrong for us in the business of life and in a life of business we should take a review:

What is my philosophy? The two Greek words which combine to be translated philosophy are *phileo* – friendship and *sophia* – wisdom. We can ask ourselves, am I friendly with the world's wisdom and ways of thinking or with God's wisdom and His ways of thinking. God's ways are to bring blessing. *'Every good and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.'* James 1:17 Whereas the world's ways are to deceive and cheat. God's ways are called 'truth' and are shown in Jesus who said, *'I am the way, the truth and the life,'* and in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.

Have I been taken in by empty deceit? In many areas the world and people in the world hold out promises of wealth and health and prosperity.

We need to discern just what is being offered.

In Luke 8 we read of the woman who had spent all her livelihood on physicians to no avail. When she touched Jesus garment she was made well. Today there is a huge industry making pills and many offers of the wonderful things they will do for us – but we need discernment so that we can benefit from the good and genuine and not waste our resources on the useless. Likewise there are many offers of a way to get rich quick – casinos, lotteries, betting, gaming and so on. Not one of these is God’s way of blessing us. On the contrary we are urged to work, and God has prepared good works for us to walk in. As always we need discernment to understand the way the Father has prepared for each of us, to be able to avoid those seemingly tempting things that come from the world or from our own thinking or indeed as traps from the enemy.

These are the part of the tradition of men and the basic principles of the world – together they say avoid God and His ways – the world says follow my ways, the devil says worship me and I will give you what you want. Jesus says, *Follow Me, ‘I am the way the truth and the life,’ and ‘I came that you may have life more abundantly.’*

Paul’s advice to the Colossians was to be grounded and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel in the business of life.

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For you who found Me

You found Me as the door, you placed your trust in My completed sacrifice and came into the eternal kingdom through Me the door - the only door, the only way in. You stepped through the door and now you find Me as the way, the truth and the life. My way is not wide in itself but leads to a wide place - the eternal kingdom

In fact My way is narrow, just as the door was narrow, and as few find and enter through the door so also few walk the narrow way. Yet My way is the way in which I can lead you in triumph to My glory. It is the way of grace, it is the way of answered prayer, it is the way of blessing and healing, it is the way of angelic help. But it is narrow.

So come walk on Me as the Way, the road the pathway, and with Me as the Way along the road, the pathway. My way is narrow because My way is the way of truth, which has been laid down in My scriptures over centuries for your benefit and guidance. I urge you not to deviate and I send My Holy Spirit to be your guide - even bringing to you My words, the words I will speak as we travel together along the way.

My reward is with Me and is ahead of you as you walk along. Look for the building not made by human hands, but the building which is built by God, prepared for you.

I have called each one to his or her peculiar walk with Me along the way - his or her special calling. To way of anointing and blessing where I will be able, through you, to demonstrate God's wisdom to the principalities and powers - My and your enemies.

The victory is won and manifests as you walk with Me in truth along the way. I will always lead you in triumph. This is the way of blessing and prosperity in Me. I call to you who will listen, for listen you must if are to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. Listen you must to know what I am saying to you - for every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from Me and from the Father. We are one and we rejoice in each and every one who comes through the door and we rejoice again over every one walking the way, the way of truth, being the way of life.

Come now you who say it is too narrow, it is too difficult. I say to you that in Me you can overcome all that the enemy throws at you and all that the world has against you. My Holy Spirit in you is greater by far. Seek Me and ask Me and I will fill you with all that you need. Ask and I will fill you with love, ask and I will lead you into more and more truth. The way is narrow - don't try to navigate it yourself. No! Walk with Me.

Take up your sword

They were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and there was great opposition. Have you noticed in life and particularly in the works that the Lord has prepared beforehand for you there can be times of great opposition?

Nehemiah, who was leading the rebuild in Jerusalem knew what he was called to do, was very determined and was very wise. He arranged that the work and workers were defended from the enemies. Each builder had his side girded with his sword and others were posted with spears.

Nehemiah ignored the taunting and the traps of the enemy.

Now we could consider this example and see how to relate its truths to our covenant relationship with Jesus. Just as Nehemiah said, 'Remember the Lord, great and awesome,' we can choose to bring to mind the greatness of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit – especially in times of need.

Just as Nehemiah armed each builder with a sword we can remember that we too have access to the sword of the Spirit. So we need to understand, what is this sword of the Spirit?

In the New Testament there are two types of sword; there is 'romphaia,' a large sword and there is the 'machira,' a short sword or dagger or slaughter knife. The large sword is the one which comes from the mouth of Jesus as He defeats His enemies. The short sword is very good for putting in the death blow in close combat.

The sword of the Spirit is the specific spoken word of God (rhema) given to us in time of need. This word produces faith of the mountain moving variety and is more than adequate to deal with all enemy work and attacks. (There is no reference to us being equipped with the large sword -the dagger, the rhema word, is totally adequate.)

Relating to the account of Nehemiah we learn valuable truths:

Nehemiah knew what the Lord called him to do and was determined. His mind set was very definite. It is very helpful to Christian life to know the mind of the Lord in relation to what He has prepared for us to walk in, and then to walk, work with all diligence 'as unto the Lord' and not unto men.

Nehemiah did not throw away his confidence in the face of difficulty and opposition. Jesus warned of tribulation in this world - it is to be expected - but be confident knowing He has overcome the world and we who are in Him are overcomers by faith.

Nehemiah was wise. He used wise strategies for the programme of rebuilding and responded with wisdom when challenged - often ignoring the goading of the enemy. We are invited to seek God's wisdom in the letter of James, who assures us that God will give wisdom liberally and without reproach.

Nehemiah persevered. Learning to persevere under pressure and under attack is part of the journey to maturity. This is why James tells us to count it all joy when we fall into various trials and to see them as opportunities to grow.

Listen and take up your sword.

Trust

Bad thoughts, evil words, things telling you it's not good enough, you're not good enough, Jesus doesn't love you, saying there is no hope. Everyone, yes everyone is challenged by bad and wrong thoughts every day. This is normal life, but it is not kingdom life. That is to say it is not God's kingdom life - so from whose kingdom do these things come?

These things come from the kingdom of darkness, from the realm of satan. Of course they don't announce the fact, but rather they try to say they are our own thoughts and we are just bad. Now we must know for sure that every bad and evil thing comes from God's and our enemy - he was a liar from the beginning and is the father of lies. (John 8:44)

Now let's remember the eternal truth - every born again believer is literally born of God and has received the gift of righteousness. Every born again believer is in right standing with the Lord. Nothing but nothing can separate us from the love of God. Every good and every perfect gift comes from Him.

The apostle Paul knew all about these things for it was to him that so much was revealed. God's eternal purpose, that the church (that's us not an institution) should demonstrate to the principalities and powers His manifold wisdom. Paul knew that meant a spiritual battle, not against flesh but against the wiles of the devil and his hosts of wickedness.

This is where 'trust' plays a very important part. We are urged to renew our minds and to focus our thoughts on Jesus and on all that is good and pure – but it is exactly here, at the level of things coming to our minds, that the enemy seeks to undermine us and to drag us down. The scripture describes these bad and evil thoughts as 'fiery darts.' If we let them they will burn!

Paul's instruction – take the shield of faith – that is the shield of trust in God to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

For example the answer to a worry, a fiery dart, is instead of worrying ask yourself 'can I trust God in this matter? And if the answer is no or don't know speak to Jesus at the throne of grace. Cast your burden on Him. Thus you will lift up the shield of faith and trust and quench that dart.

We find it in 2 Corinthians 10 – the weapons of our warfare are mighty in God, demolishing strongholds and arguments and everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God which brings us His peace. Every soldier goes to battle fully armed – in day to day life you will need your shield of trust in God. Be sure to take the whole armour otherwise you will not be able to stand against the wiles of the enemy.

The truth and nothing else, Jesus righteousness within you, walk with Him, put on your helmet to guard your mind, carry your sword (God's specific word to you) and lift up that shield of trust in Him

Take responsibility

As born again and Spirit filled Christians we have a wonderful Father and are blessed with the indwelling Holy Spirit who brings us the words of Jesus, our coming bridegroom. As those picked out in foreknowledge, to be literally born of God the Father, we enjoy His presence and guidance here on earth, with the expectation of an inheritance so good it is way beyond our imagination.

That all came at a price as we know, the ultimate price paid by Jesus in order to usher in the New Covenant. The covenant that says 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' 'Nothing can separate us.' Also it is a covenant which says, 'I am your Lord.' And so, first and foremost we worship. Then it is as servants, or love-slaves as Paul put it, that we take responsibility.

The responsibility we take is to listen to the Lord and to the guidance of the Spirit and to apply what He says. For the married - for husbands that means laying down your life for your wife. This is the most important thing after worshipping the Lord Himself. For wives it is respecting, revering your husband, walking together with him. For the two of us, brought together as one, then jointly it is to walk together in sensitivity to each other and in sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit. This comes before ministry, before business before anything else. As we walk along, as one in the Lord He will bring blessing upon blessing to His glory.

Then in the business of life on earth, whether that be commerce, or service of some sort we are called to work as unto the Lord. That means seeing what we do, our calling in life, as being of the highest value because it is He who gives the calling! In it He will display His manifold wisdom with guidance, with His presence, with His anointing and with movements of His Spirit (whether by miracle or by angel). The vital element is to recognise He is Lord - that is He is boss, it is unto Him that we do what we do. He knows the best way for us to go, the best business plans - much better than anything we can devise, and definitely the right thing to be doing because He is Lord Boss.

When we have these settled in our understanding and working in life then we can consider the area of what we call ministry. This is third because any ministry we indulge in will be hampered if our life isn't in order. All ministry should come from compassion and from leading of the Spirit. Who can prophesy unless the Spirit gives the very words - answer, a false prophet! All ministry needs to coming from the Spirit - hopefully though nice cleansed vessels!

A key way of thinking - I can't do it, but praise God He can do all things and can do them in and through me as I flow with Him as Lord Boss as well as bridegroom whom I respect and revere.

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Pour in the oil and the wine

There are times when we or our loved ones or our friends and neighbours hit bad times or even rock bottom.

When a lawyer, trying to justify himself and being a bit tricky, asked Jesus, *'who is my neighbour?'* Jesus answered with a parable. (A parable is a story which parallels the truth.)

A man was going from Jerusalem to Jericho – that is he was going about his normal business. He was attacked by robbers, stripped, beaten and left half dead. His normal life had taken a really bad turn and he was left lying in the way in a desperate condition.

Luckily a priest comes along – just the man to help- but NO, he passes by. Then a Levite, but again NO help.

Indicating that the Law was unable to show mercy, Just as Jesus said, *'Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice and mercy and faith.'* Matthew 23:23

The fruit of legalism and religion was hard hearted and of no use to the suffering. Then along comes a Samaritan. He sees the injured man, bandages his wounds pouring in oil and wine. Then he sets him on his own animal and takes him to the nearest hostelry. More than that he pays for the man's upkeep until he restored to good health.

When we see our loved ones, our friends and neighbours in trouble it is time to bring on the oil and the wine, to bandage wounds - to be practical and show mercy. How would this work? We have ability beyond our own understanding - we pray, we listen for guidance and we can receive from heaven 'oil' and 'wine,' things to say and things to do, for any and every need.

Wine is to gladden the heart - most appropriate for those struck down by life's bad experiences. Oil is to make one's face shine - to bring joy where there has been calamity. For us these represent specific words and instructions from above, *'where every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights with whom there is no shadow of turning,'* (James 1:17) just the very thing needed to minister to those who have been 'injured' by life's experiences and by attacks from the enemy and the world.

We can see the Samaritan as representing Jesus. The Samaritan gives the innkeeper two denarii saying, *'take care of him and whatever more you spend when I come again I will repay you.'* Showing that Jesus makes full provision for the recovery of the injured - He can do the same for every one of us sufficient even up to and including the time when He comes again.

Will you be unhelpful like the priest and the Levite or merciful like the Samaritan? Can you receive 'oil' and 'wine' in the form of words and instructions from heaven?

Much more, much more, and yet still much more

Much more what? To answer this question we turn to Romans 5 where we will find :

Much more justification by His blood resulting in being saved from wrath through Jesus (verse 9). This is the foundation of our faith and our relationship with the Lord. Much more means the amount of justification was over abundantly supplied at the crucifixion. We have been reconciled with God now walk in right standing with Him. Halleluiah there is no fear of wrath!

Much more having been reconciled through Jesus death we shall be saved by His life leading to our rejoicing. His death was essential to deal with the problems and resurrection essential to bring in the life in the New Covenant purchased by His blood. (verse 10) Praise the Lord He came to give us life more abundantly.

Much more the grace of God and the gift of grace by the one Man, Jesus Christ abounded to many. Not only does grace abound towards us but also: (verse 15)

Much more those who receive the abundance of grace will reign in life through the One Jesus Christ. Here it is advantageous to realise that the word 'receive,' *lambano*, in the Greek means to 'take hold of' - receiving the abundance of grace has our active participation - taking hold of it. (Verse 17) You are invited - come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Much more where sin abounded grace abounded even more. (verse 20) We all fall short some times and it is great to realise the Lord has it all covered . So we don't need to get overly troubled by our failures - rather we confess them before the throne of grace and He forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) And more - His Holy Spirit changes us from one degree of glory to another - He is on our case! (2 Corinthians 3:18)

How can we respond to such abundance of loving care and concern for us - its much, much more than we could ever deserve! One response is to love Jesus more abundantly day by day - that doesn't come naturally so seeking the Holy Spirit to abundantly fill us with love for Jesus much more and much more is an excellent response. It has consequences - you find yourself more and more wanting to walk on the 'King's Highway of holiness.' More and more you appreciate Jesus as the way and as the truth and as the life. More and more your confidence in Jesus increases. More and more you want to walk in the Spirit. More and more you want to communicate with Him.

So, the big question - How are you doing? Do you have room for much more grace? Do you want much more of all that He has to offer?

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Will we still be standing?

In these days our enemy is very active. Pandemic, lockdowns, anxiety – governments have been wrong footed, people and the nations have been and are suffering. Conflict in the spiritual realm is being worked out on earth. So we ask the question, 'Will we still be standing when Jesus comes?' He asked this question in a slightly different way, '*When the Son of Man comes will He really find faith on the earth?*' (Luke 18:8)

Jesus asked this question just after teaching the parable of the persistent widow. She was being oppressed by the adversary, so she did two things. She demanded justice from the unrighteous judge (representing the devil – the unrighteous power) and she persisted in prayer to her and our Lord. Her persistence in both these things brought her the victory. Then Jesus asked the question!

Paul was adamant in the need for us to do everything to stand and to keep standing in his letter to the Ephesians. But can we stand when the enemy comes in like a flood? Sustained evil pressure and attack is hard to bear and it can seem easier to give in – that, of course, is what our enemy wants. Scripture brings hope '*When the enemy comes in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.*' Isaiah 59:19.

What is this standard, how will it help? The Hebrew word is '*nos*' which means 'to put to flight,' 'to make to run away.' So now we need to know what happens in practice.

Peter writes to explain. *'Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant, because your enemy the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you.'* 1 Peter 5:6-11 He will do it!

In practice there is a time for us to resist the devil - because it is God's eternal purpose for the church to demonstrate His wisdom to principalities and powers. (Ephesians 3:10-11) So we stand and we keep standing, resisting the devil. In due time the Lord God shows the way of escape. He will not allow us to be tested beyond what we can bear without providing the way of escape. Now put these things together - it is the Spirit who lifts up the standard, the 'put to flight. Our way of escape will be there, in the Spirit.

The Spirit works with words, with visions, through us and others. At all times we need sensitivity to the Spirit - under severe attack we need that sensitivity more and more - so the promise of God to always lead us in triumph can be fulfilled.

Highly favoured

It must have been amazing for Mary when an angel appeared before her and says, 'Rejoice, highly favoured one (*charitoo* in Greek), the Lord is with you' and 'do not be afraid for you have found favour with God.' Luke 1:28 and 30

Of course Mary was highly favoured for she would bear in her own body the Messiah, that is God the Son. Now consider us - we too are described as highly favoured, 'He made us accepted, that is highly favoured, (*charitoo* in Greek) in the beloved.' Ephesians 1:6 We too bear God, that is in the form of the Holy Spirit, in our own bodies. What immense privilege we have!

If we were to dwell for a moment on the concept of being highly favoured by God what would be the result. Surely we would come into a place of great security, a place of great peace and a place of great hope. We could mess up the picture like the apostle Peter when he saw Jesus transfigured and wanted to build a tent, a shelter for Him. But God is a God of grace, there was no rebuke to Peter for thinking he could in some feeble way do something for the Lord, rather the voice from heaven comes, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear Him.' Matthew 17:4-5

This was the command from heaven 'hear Him.' You don't have to dream up your own ideas, your own attempts to please - that is just 'fig leaves.' Listen to Him and understand. There are good works already prepared for you to walk in. That is where the anointing is available to you, to enable His grace to flow and to be seen. This is the result of being highly favoured, so listen and obey.

Paul warned Timothy that in the last days the times would become hard to bear because men become lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers and many other undesirable characteristics. There would even be a form of godliness, a sort of reverence of god, but utterly powerless. Paul's advice was to carefully continue in the truth of scripture - for the truth is the safe way and the safe place. (2 Timothy 3:1-7)

How immense is the favour we have with the Holy Spirit, whose role it is to lead us into all truth, dwelling inside. How important it is to listen, to learn to walk in the Spirit! No wonder the voice from heaven said, 'This is My beloved Son, listen to Him.' For the apostles that was listen to Jesus as they walked together, for us it is listen to the Spirit whose role is to bring us the words of Jesus. (John 16:13-14) Then we can expect to see -

As Isaiah said, 'Arise shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.' And Malachi, 'You will again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.'

1 plus one, two, three.....

Here is the essence of teams. By definition not a lone person doing his or her thing, but two or more working together. For us the vital **1** is the Holy Spirit, then we can add one, two, three and so on making our team.

In Leviticus the scripture gives an indication of the effect of teams – *‘Five of you shall chase 100 (enemies) and a hundred of you shall put 10,000 to flight.’* (26:8) When we developed Transformed Working Life in the first instance we were a team of **1** plus 6. Of course it is the **1** that makes all the difference, but only when we see Him as the leader of the team and seek Him in prayer. Then the team has to be united. *‘Can two walk together unless they are agreed.’* Amos 3:3

So many times things break down, even in churches, because the team is not agreed. Too eager to go by majority vote rather than wait until full agreement has been reached as the team members wait on the Lord. I had the experience of being in a meeting of about 30. 29 were agreed and 1 was not. But we waited on the Lord together and when we did that 29 changed their mind and we went forward together. (It was not because the 1 was in any way dominant – rather it was to be sure we were moving in Spirit together.)

There is immense power in the working of teams. Even a team of the Holy Spirit plus one has great power from the Lord. However too often we see 'one man teams' go astray. That is why the Apostle Paul instructed Timothy and Titus to establish plurality, elders, in every place.

In all of life and particularly in commerce, at work, in any corporate setting the working together with the Holy Spirit and others will bring fruit. Transformed Working Life was taken to many countries by various team members - usually at least two at a time. Not only was it highly acclaimed everywhere but also the Lord confirmed His word with His presence and with such signs as He wanted to give.

So here is my question. Do I work through life as a team with the Holy Spirit as leader and, if married, with my spouse as an equal team member? Do I seek to be agreed with the Holy Spirit and with others so we can walk together? Or do I make my own decisions then ask the Lord to bless them instead of listening so I know what He has prepared for me to walk in.

The blessing of the Lord is what we want to experience. We love to see Him acting on our behalf. He is willing, very willing. He is good, very good and has prepared the way for us to be both blessed and a blessing to others. It is only as a team with the Holy Spirit as leader that we will fulfil our spiritual destiny.

Build an ark for life

They were multiplying rapidly – people were populating the earth. Evil forces moved in amongst the people. Before long wickedness had spread everywhere. Nobody believed what was coming. No one cared that every intent of the thoughts of the hearts of men had become only evil continually. Nobody believed what was coming even whilst Noah built the ark!

It became time for God to act, judgement was required. But Noah was righteous and he found favour with God. We are all familiar with the account of the great worldwide flood.

So what about my life, your life. Born again we have been given the righteousness of Christ and we have an eternal inheritance. But we don't know what is coming tomorrow, next week, next month.

Just as the Lord told Noah to build an ark, and gave him specific plans for its construction, in like manner the Lord has plans for my life and your life. Now, these are not just random plans – rather they are His special plans that fit together with others for the working of His Kingdom on earth. These plans, which give us a future and a hope, are the place where we will be able to fulfil His purposes and find fulfilment.

Noah had to build carefully following the instructions and he had to gather into the ark all the life and animals as God directed. But Noah couldn't make the ark secure and watertight.

Noah applied pitch inside and out but couldn't cover the doorway - the Lord Himself shut them in.

Is my life and your life secure no matter what happens ? Well that will depend on whether or not I am following the plans and instructions that God has for my ark. If I am following my own plans, rather than His, will He apply His blessing by 'shutting me in, protecting me from every storm ? Our world is moving quickly in the same direction of evil as the one in the time of Noah, inviting judgement. Meanwhile the 'storms' around life intensify.

It is definitely time to be in the safety of God's plans and instructions for life - our own ark.

So what does my ark look like ? It starts with Ephesians 2:10 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.' When I worked in practice as an accountant there were times when unjust legal actions were taken against me - but I was following the Lord's calling and He had 'shut me in' the ark. It was a safe place and more that a safe place. It was also a place where His anointing flowed. There was no doubt - whilst there would be storms and there would be times when specific divine help was needed, His promise held firm. We were delivered, we were provided for - the ark was the place where Jesus promise of life more abundantly could and did come to fruition.

How is your ark?

Build an ark for life - 2

Last time we saw that it is important to be building in the right place - that is in the calling and work that the Lord has already prepared for us and not in our own desires and imaginations - for we are His, bought with a price. And so to build.

The Holy Spirit tells us there are three things with eternal value that exist and remain - faith, hope and love. Surely these are the important things - things with eternal value.

Faith is that trust in the Lord in all matters. Trust grows and grows as we know Him and His ways better and better as described for us in the living and active word. Faith brings His power to bear as we listen and hear His spoken word to us. Without faith we cannot be pleasing to Him and we will live a substandard life. The abundant life Jesus promised us is found in trust and faith - through these He is very present with us in our daily lives.

Hope is the certainty that no matter what the Lord will bring blessing. It is a specific promise found in Romans 8:28 'All things work together for good to those who love God.' In all walks of life; professions, commerce, services, homemaking, indeed everything, this promise builds a certainty into our lives. Even when circumstances seem to be against us, nevertheless the promise remains - bad things and good things, all things God will work to our good. It is a promise for us to claim!

Love is that amazing feature of our Saviour - that He put our needs (for salvation and deliverance from sin) above His own desires. Jesus did not want to go to the cross - indeed He asked the Father if it was possible there could be another way. Love is a principle that we can weave into our business, our work, into our life. The principle is to benefit others by making the choice to do so - just as Jesus did to our enormous benefit. This love, the type of love God has is 'love by choice.' We can all make good choices.

The more we consider it the more we will see that it is all about Jesus and His life working through us. The works He has prepared, with faith/trust He provides through scripture and by speaking to us, in the certainty of the future blessing of hope, with His very nature abounding within for God is love.

And so we can come to rest, just as Noah's ark came through storms and difficulties to rest on the mountain, so we can rest from our own endeavours and instead be carried along by God's Spirit. That is what it means to walk in the Spirit - knowing we can do nothing of value of ourselves, but in Him nothing is impossible as He leads. And so let us agree with the Lord so that we can walk together to His glory and our blessing.

The mind - friend or foe

Is my mind a friend or a foe, a servant or an enslaver? Of course it can be both. It will depend on which part of me is in control. As a born again Christian with the Holy Spirit dwelling inside there is the capacity and opportunity for the indwelt human spirit to be in control. But it is not automatic!

Jesus warned us that satan is the prince or ruler of this world (John 12:31), and that he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44) So it is not a surprise to find that this world is absolutely full of lies. Some lies appear to be innocuous - for example the one who believes that by being good he or she will find favour with God and be saved is believing a lie. Jesus said the only way to inherit eternal life is to believe in Him. Other lies are much more obviously evil and can result in major atrocities like world war, persecutions and so on.

On our day to day level our mind will either act as a friend or a foe. As the mind is part of our 'flesh' and the flesh wars with the spirit we are all in need of renewing our minds in accordance with the truth. It is for this reason that we are urged to study the scripture, to pray and to seek more and more understanding, for this is building up our position in truth - that makes recognising lies and renewing the mind easier.

Day to day we are bombarded by this world's thinking. Paul warns, 'Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of this world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8) It is in the very nature of lies that whilst they may hold out the promise of something good in reality that fades away or becomes evil. The way satan deceived Eve is a prime example.

Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that is proceeding from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4) This is the truth. Everything the Lord God speaks to us is true and is good for every aspect of life. Satan on the other hand will whisper lies like, 'you don't think God will speak to you do you,' and 'God doesn't love you,' and you don't think you are saved do you?' And many similar things. The only antidote to lies is truth. What does the bible say - God loves and chooses to love us, He speaks to us - listen, and once we are born again it is His eternal gift which cannot be undone for He remains faithful.

Start to accept a lie and lies will increase and increase and soon we are immersed in 'miry clay,' and down in a 'deep pit.' Take control of what you will allow in your mind and think on that which is true and good and noble and so on, making your mind your servant and friend. (Philippians 4:8)

Extraordinary

Have you ever considered things this way - there is ordinary and there is extraordinary. We can live life in in the ordinary or in the extraordinary!

How would we define the ordinary? Well the bible does that for us in Paul's letter to the Colossians 2:8. This is the ordinary - 'Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of this world, and not according to Christ.' One of earliest attacks on the newly emerging church was pressure to adopt Greek philosophy because it was so widespread in the world and it had the appearance of being good. Influential people in the early church copied and introduced these ways becoming known as the 'gnostics,' - leading away from the actual truth into fantasies.

The world's philosophy, its traditions and its basic principles will cheat you, that is take plunder and rob. This is the ordinary way of the world. Yet from our earliest days we are brought up and educated in the ways of the world! A major rethink is essential.

The major rethink consists of absorbing the real truth instead of the deception of empty philosophy and tradition. One clear example is found in Mark 7:8-13. Jesus is criticising the Jewish leaders for laying aside the commandment of God (to provide for their parents) by inventing 'corban.'

Corban is just saying, 'whatever you may have had in support from me is a gift to God,' then they didn't have to honour their parents. The real truth was replaced by a man made tradition. Both parties were robbed - the parents of support in their old age and the son was robbed of the blessing that is due for keeping God's word.

Ordinary will always result in loss! The ways of the world rob and cheat.

Extraordinary, on the other hand, will always result in blessing because the Lord invites us to the throne of grace specifically so that He may be the help we need.

Extraordinary is following Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. That is life of obedience to the will of God, a life that will demonstrate His divine character and fulfil His eternal purpose. Extraordinary is a way of life and business that listens to the Lord, hears what He says, and does it.

Where ordinary looks principally after oneself, often to the detriment of others, extraordinary follows the Spirit and becomes a blessing to others and is blessed.

Extraordinary is a life lived in truth - that is written for us and spoken to us. A life led by the Spirit of God, both from the Spirit within and without. As Jesus said, He will be in you and He will be with you. John 14;17

We live in a world dominated by ordinary ways of living, but we have extra - that wonderful extra of knowing the Lord, being known by Him and being led by His Spirit in all of life and business.

My safe place

Where is your safe place? This question needs to be split into two parts. The natural part - where do I feel safe and the spiritual part - where am I safe?

For me and my family we feel safe at home. It is where we have lived for many years. We know both the house and the area well. There are no credible threats here. It feels safe. If one wants to indulge in fantasy it would be possible to imagine a possible threat such as something dropping out of the sky. But there is no point in thinking about that, for if it were to happen there would be nothing to be done!

As one who teaches the bible my safe place is 'the truth.' That definition means different things to different people. My 'truth' is not necessarily your 'truth' or so it seems. However the safe place is that which the Lord God considers to be true, not my or your understanding, which will be incomplete at best and possibly mistaken in parts.

God's truth, when we receive it, brings a wonderful promise, 'and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free,' (John 8:32.) In a world that wants to bring us into bondage to its traditions and philosophy, and by them to cheat and to rob us, this promise is invaluable.

We can conclude that receiving more and more of God's truth will be good for us, indeed very good for us. Always there are potential difficulties. Our three enemies are ranged against us – the enemy who would deceive us with his lies, the world which wants to distract us to its ways and our own 'flesh' or 'being' which wars with the Spirit.

This is now an urgent word for today. The world is rushing head long towards the end scenario. Time is becoming short. God's truth is under attack from every side. Beloved believers are under pressure and under attack. Only God's truth is the safe place.

What is to be done? Is there any help at hand? Absolutely YES. 'When the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.' (Jesus words recorded in John 16:13-14)

The help is abundantly there. 'Ask (keep asking) and it will be given to you, knock (keep knocking) and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks (keeps asking) receives and he who seeks finds and to him who knocks it will be opened.' 'How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him.' (Matthew 7:7-8 and 11)

We build safe dwellings for our physical beings, yet it is far more important to build our own safe place in the truth – for that is for eternity.

The God of all grace will ...

The Apostle Peter raises the alarm, 'Be sober be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,'

The Apostle Paul was continually buffeted by a thorn in the flesh from satan.

We live in two dimensions - the natural and the spiritual. Our enemy seeks to keep us away from the spiritual dimension where we receive words of grace and help from the Lord, by having us bogged down with problems in the natural realm. His army of spiritual forces can attack relentlessly or sporadically. Their primary weapons are aimed at our thinking - lies and exaggerations. To counter each lie and accusation with the truth is a daily necessity.

The lies can come in various forms - the lie that says you will fail because you always fail, or you are no good, you have always been no good, should be obvious enough to counter with the truth - God always leads us in triumph for example. How about the more tempting offer - just as satan offered Jesus the world if he would worship him. That thought to break the rules just a little to gain advantage. Or that challenge, if you were a real Christian you would (add your own words here) - countered by being led by the Spirit - As Jesus said - man lives by every word that proceeds from the Lord.

Dwelling on wrong thinking can lead to severe stresses and strains - particularly in the mind, leading to physical symptoms also. Indeed the current pandemic has been causing a massive increase in anxiety - surely the work of our enemy to add spiritual power to what is a natural event. Jesus warned us there would be pandemics (pestilences) in the gospel of Matthew. (24:7)

It is no wonder that the scripture is definite about our thinking. Philippians 4:8 urges us to think only on that which is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. Paul instructs us on taking every thought captive unto Jesus because we are at war, whether we like it or not, with the spiritual forces of evil. (Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). He also warns us that the world is out to cheat us with its philosophy and empty deceit. (Colossians 2:8)

Peter brings good news. After the warning quoted at the start he says this, 'But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever.' He will certainly do it because His promises are Yes and Amen. Therefore do not throw away your confidence - it has great reward.

Be aware that the main battle is for our thinking - because 'as a man thinks so he is.' Lets keep our focus meditating on the truth and on the glory to come.

The law of Spirit and life

As Christians under the New Covenant we are free from the Law given to Israel - it was fulfilled on our behalf by Jesus. But there are other 'laws' which operate around us. For example, without the law of gravity where would we be?

And so to consider the law of Spirit and life as compared to the law of sin and death. Both these laws are operating today and the question is which of them are we under? Born again we are indwelt by the Spirit and set free from the law of sin and death. That leaves all unbelievers still subject to sin and death - until each individual meets Jesus for themselves.

However, it is still possible for us to operate in the wrong realm - to operate in the same ways as the world which is in sin and death. When we do that we suffer loss. Paul was writing about these matters to the Romans in chapter 8. He tells them: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death.' (verses 1 and 2)

This is the wonderful New Covenant - we are free and can enjoy freedom. The Lord God does not interfere with our free will - so we can, and surely sometimes do, choose the wrong path. No condemnation, pick yourself up with repentance and walk on again fully restored to all righteousness. (1 John 1:9)

The Apostle Paul gave the Romans some wise advice on how to go forward - God condemned sin by sending Jesus who fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law. Now with 'Christ in us the hope of glory,' we are also freed from the requirements of the law. Here is our choice - 'Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Choice! Every day there are choices to be made. One measure of the choices we make is found by considering, am I at peace, do I have peace about my actions and decisions and my intended actions? A 'golden rule - 'No peace no do.' Unease, when considering what to do, should alert us to praying and seeking the Lord.

When teaching in Africa I was likened to a giraffe. Feet on the ground and head in the clouds as it were. The more I consider that the more relevant it seems. Feet on the ground of course but all our actions are determined from our heads. To have our heads in the realm of the Spirit, in the clouds, is the way to walk in the law of Spirit and life - and to avoid following the ways of sin and death.

Freedom is ours to enjoy!

New every morning

‘Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul, therefore I hope in Him.’
Lamentations 3:22-24

In the midst of utter destruction (of Jerusalem) Jeremiah cries out to God, ‘great is your faithfulness.’ Around him life lies in ruins, but, the Lord has never let him down, He is faithful. As Jeremiah put it the Lord says, ‘I know the thoughts I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts for peace and not for evil to give you a future and a hope.’
Jeremiah 29:11

Good times and bad times the Lord remains faithful throughout – thinking good thoughts towards us, ready to respond to our prayers and supplications. No wonder we can have hope! He knows of all the things that will cross our paths – did not Jesus say, ‘in this world you will have tribulation,’ but went on to say, ‘but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.’ John 16:33

There can be times when it doesn’t seem like it – but tomorrow will be a new day. God has ‘new’ mercy and compassion for each and every day. Regardless of what today brings there is hope for tomorrow. A number of times God spoke to Israel, when they were in great distress, tomorrow there will be deliverance.

Tomorrow holds the hope of God's grace and mercy for each and every one and each and every situation – we are not alone in this world, Jesus is with us by His Spirit within.

The world, our enemy and even our own flesh all try their worst, but we are not consumed! God's grace is sufficient. Paul suffered more than most but was able to say, 'God always leads us in triumph.' This will be our experience too. Our final victory is utterly assured – it's just the pathway on the journey can get a bit rough! Yet the Lord expects to lead us and guide along the way as we seek Him and seek His help – so that we can say of our life's journey, 'The Lord is my portion, therefore I hope in Him and find that great is His faithfulness.'

Of course life can get very difficult especially if we are carrying a heavy load. But Jesus counselled us to take His yoke upon us for His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Matthew 11:30. This is the way of rest, as we learn from Him we will find rest for our souls. So every day we can submit our way to Him, listening for His voice, 'this is the way, walk ye in it.' Worldly ways and worldly thinking will have to give way to His, much better, way. Led by the Spirit all things are possible, nothing is impossible.

Tomorrow is a new day. New will be His grace and mercy for you and for me. Let hope flourish!

Cannot be broken

'Jesus said, ' the scripture cannot be broken.' John 10:35

His statement came as a shock to the Jews – they had set up their own methods of rendering the scripture inoperative! Jesus exposed one such scheme:

'Moses said honour your father and mother, but you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban (that is a gift to God) then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.' Mark 7:10-13

However, the word cannot be broken so they were in disobedience – that is sin, even rebellion against the clear word of the Lord. The power of the word of God to bless or to curse was declared to the Israelites by Moses and is found in Deuteronomy 28. So their choice was foolhardy - history records the consequences!

Through the redemptive blood of Jesus we are not bound by the Law, indeed we are free to do whatever we like – nevertheless the principle of the Lord God wanting to bless His people remains. The Lord is entirely righteous so cannot bless our unrighteousness, our sinful ways.

So we find we are exhorted throughout the new covenant to live holy lives, to be holy because He is holy.

We fail from time to time, but the Lord looks at the heart. In the example of Corban the heart of the Jews was fixed on denying the scripture. For most of us we desire to be pleasing to the Lord but sometimes miss the mark

What do we take from this short saying of Jesus:

First The scripture is not affected, or broken, or rendered inoperative by our attitudes and actions.

Second Watch out for traditions that are at odds with the scripture – there are many of those, just as there were in Jesus day. Traditions are not more important than the scripture.

Recognise that the Lord God knows best and has 'breathed' His word through the writers of the bible for our benefit. (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Walk in the good works He has prepared for you -that is the place of His anointing and blessing. (Ephesians 2:10)
Be led by the Holy Spirit who is given to us as our counsellor – the one who is alongside, and within, to lead and guide and help us as we live day by day in a world alien to Him who created it.

The scripture, the word of God, cannot be broken. It is our choice to walk in the light of His declared truth or to deny Him and walk in our own wisdom. Either way consequences will follow for good or for bad. Definitely it is time to make the good choice, 'As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.' (Joshua 24:15)

Come ... and be broken

‘Come unto Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn for Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.’ Mathew 11:28-30.

Jesus likens Himself to the stone which the builders rejected and said, ‘whoever falls on this stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.’ Matthew 21:44

The promise of eternal life is for everyone who believes, and comes to Jesus for forgiveness of sins, and it carries the wonderful promise of a future in glory with the King of Kings. However we are totally unsuitable for glory so we need to be broken.

That is:

Broken of self importance. Broken of self reliance. Broken of pride and arrogance. Broken of selfishness. Broken of our own works. Broken of everything that sets itself against the truth and the kingdom of God. Broken of these things so that we may take on the character of Jesus. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about this change from one degree of glory to another and He works within us bit by bit - a lifelong process of being made ready for eternity.

The crowning completion of the process is when we rise to meet Him in the air and are changed in the twinkling of an eye and take on glorified bodies like His body. We become immortal and incorruptible – what a glorious prospect. (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

The future is glorious, the present is problematical. Jesus advises – ‘Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.’ Matthew 6:34. A clear call to live in the day and not in the future! Worrying about what might happen tomorrow is living in imagined difficulties which likely will never happen.

Today is what matters now. Living today in contact and in fellowship with the Holy Spirit is the call to each and every born again believer. He will lead and guide. In Him we will be fruitful. In Him we will continue to be changed from one degree of glory to another. Even as one sits at the computer to write a message like this it’s value is directly related to the degree of listening and being led by Him.

Jesus promised rest for our souls – that comes when we follow rather than when we try to go ahead in our own strength. Better to realise that His whole desire towards us is for our good. ‘I know the thoughts I think towards you, thoughts for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.’

Broken of our own effort and self reliance makes way to be led into the rest Jesus promises and the glory of His felt presence day by day.

The 'ayes' have it

In the English Parliament, when there is a vote on an issue and after the counting, you may hear the call, 'the ayes have it, the ayes have it.' 'Aye,' pronounced the same as 'eye' meaning 'yes' - the yes vote defeated the no vote.

When we look for God's 'aye - yes' we are looking for that which He has planned for us to fulfil His desires and purposes here on earth. In fact we read in 2 Chronicles 16:9 that His eyes search the earth, '*for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.*' The problem for Judah, and King Asa in particular, was that they were relying on Syria to defend them, buying their assistance with the treasures of the house of the Lord. They were not relying on the Lord their God. The prophet, Hanani, brought the word of the Lord to Asa - 'you have done foolishly,' because his heart was not loyal to God.

A week or two back we saw how the Jews had developed ways of avoiding the Law they had been given. We saw the declaration of 'corban,' (a gift to God) was used to free themselves from their responsibility towards their parents - this became their tradition. (And many like things they did.)

The eyes of the Lord are looking at what we do - He wants to show Himself strong on our behalf. That is on our behalf in daily life in all its aspects and particularly in business. But we should ask the question - are our traditional ways getting in the way of God's blessing over us. By our traditions we mean anything that is keeping us away from 'walking in the Spirit,' and particularly the traditions of men according to the basic principles of this world. These things will cheat you at two levels - they restrict the Lord from showing Himself strong on your behalf and the ways of the world are contrary to the ways of the Spirit seeking to cheat and rob from you and me.

The scripture tells us to let our 'yes' be 'yes' and our 'no' be 'no' (Matthew 5:37) because God's 'aye - yes' is 'yes' and His 'no' is 'no.' We may have a good idea and want the Lord to bless it, but that is not His way. He has already prepared a way for us to go, and that is where He will show Himself strong on our behalf. Our plan, idea might even seem to be very spiritual - a crusade or something we plan 'for the Lord.' Even Paul tried to go to one place and was stopped by the Spirit and re-directed, in a dream, to Macedonia. (Acts 16:7-10)

I want to be where the Lord will show Himself strong on my behalf - that has been experience in my business calling and in work with ICCA.

How about you?

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We have been trusted with the gospel

'even so we speak , not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts,' (1 Thessalonians 2:4) What does He see when He considers my heart and yours? He is looking for loyalty in our hearts so that He may show Himself strong on our behalf. So what are we doing with the gospel - that good news of the good tidings of the kingdom of God, and of salvation through Christ, to be received by faith in His sacrifice on our behalf?

What is loyalty to the Lord on a day to day basis? Surely the answer to that is well described by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians:

Take note - we are to make known His manifold wisdom to principalities and powers (that's His eternal purpose! 3:10)

Take note - put on the new man -that is walk in the spirit, being led in true righteousness and holiness - at home, at work, everywhere all the time. (4:17-)

Take note - walk in love, thus being an imitator of God. Love covers a multitude of sins. (5:1-)

Take note - walk in light, finding out what is acceptable to the Lord, having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. (5:8-)

Take note - walk in wisdom. See then that you walk carefully, not as fools but as wise. Ask for wisdom and you will receive. (5:15-)

Be faithful in relationships – in marriage, at work, in everything let your yes be yes and your no be no. You are not serving men but the Lord. (6)

Dress correctly – put on the whole armour of God. Be very sure to have the belt of truth strapped on securely - the only safe way, the only way of loyalty to the Lord is to follow the path of truth, as given to us in the New Covenant. Let us avoid the temptation to ‘cherry pick’ which bits of the scripture we like or agree with while ignoring other parts we find difficult or too challenging.

The Lord is preparing an abundant entrance for us into His everlasting kingdom. Peter (2 Peter 1:2-11) tells us His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness and has given us exceedingly great and precious promises through which we become partakers of the divine nature – we, you and me, are partakers of His divine nature! That is a high calling!

So be diligent, increase in faith, in virtue, knowledge, self control, perseverance, godliness and brotherly kindness – as these abound you will be neither barren nor unfruitful. And so Peter says he will remind us always of these things. We can agree with the Holy Spirit as He changes us from one degree of glory to another - yes change me, make me more like Jesus.

Hidden in plain sight

Think on this – what is hidden in plain sight and what hides it? The will of God is hidden in plain sight – because for it to be revealed requires something from us. On the one hand the will of God is clearly expressed in the scripture when ones eyes are not darkened to it. At the time of Jesus the Jewish leaders actually knew the truth – but it did not serve their own purposes, they preferred the darkness.

We face the same question - do I want to follow the purposes of God or my own desires and ambitions. Does God's plan for me fit with my plan for me? This is where the love of the Lord has primary importance. If I love the Lord with all my heart, all my soul and all my mind and strength – then it will be my desire to please Him and to fulfil His will.

Paul explains that we will know the will of God when we present our bodies to Him as living sacrifices and that this is our reasonable service. That, of course, means not being conformed to this world by the renewing of our minds – taking every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Then we will know the will of God – that which has been hidden in plain sight will become clear to us through being led into all truth by the Holy Spirit.

But what if I don't like that which the Lord has prepared for me to walk in, or it does not suit what I want to do? That is the point Paul is making – it is our reasonable service to be a living sacrifice because of what Jesus has done for us. And because He has bought us with the price of His own sacrifice. Whilst the Lord allows us the choice to follow and obey Him or not, our choice(s) will have consequences.

The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth looking for those whose heart is loyal to Him – so that He can show Himself strong on their behalf. This is a consequence of the choices we make. Loyalty to Him is to walk in what He has prepared, in truth, and as led by His Spirit – choosing to align our own desires and ambitions with that which is laid out for us in scripture and what is revealed to us by His Spirit.

Of course it has its difficulties, because our enemy will try to affect and cloud our thinking in order to hide in plain sight that which the Lord wants for us. It is a day by day matter of being aware of what we are thinking - the enemies greatest weapon is lies which he uses to hide or obscure or even to disguise as truth, just as he did with Eve in the garden of Eden and has done all through history where he can.

The truth will set us free – let's keep our thinking and actions obedient to Jesus and enjoy Him showing Himself strong on our behalf.

Even the trees will clap their hands

Sometimes things appear to be heavy and difficult so it is appropriate to remind ourselves of what the Lord God thinks about the matter.

‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, My ways are not your ways.’ ‘My thoughts and ways are higher than yours.’ ‘The rain and snow come down from heaven to water the earth and bring forth seed to the sower and bread to the eater – so shall My word that goes forth from My mouth, it shall not return to Me void.’ ‘It will prosper in that for which I send it.’ ‘You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace – the mountains and hills shall break forth into singing before you and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.’ (Paraphrase from Isaiah 55:8-12)

Sometimes the written word of God transcends our natural thinking and our ability to absorb it. So we have to expand our viewpoint - can the trees of the field clap their hands? It is obviously being spoken metaphorically as trees don't have hands - and yet who can deny that when Jesus returns and the children of God are revealed creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (Romans 8:21-2) What that will entail we can only wonder and marvel at!

What we do know is that the word of the Lord will accomplish what it is sent for. And we know we are not expected to live on natural things alone - ' man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' (Matthew 4:4) Perhaps life seems a bit heavy, a bit laboured - as it can when we live on bread alone. Jesus invites us to that deeper place where we receive His words and receive His rest. How do we get there? 1 We cast all our cares on Him, resisting our adversary we look to Jesus to perfect, establish, strengthen and settle us as advised by Peter (1 Peter 6:11)

How do we get there? 2 We choose to put on our garment of praise because we know the word of God does not return to Him void, and the word of God tells us that there is a garment of praise for heaviness. Put it on and we become trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified.

This is the good news of our salvation, this is what Jesus came for, to proclaim liberty , to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, to provide all we need to be the trees of righteousness - so that He may be glorified - so we may be trees of righteousness planted by the river bringing forth fruit in season as what we do prospers. (Luke 4, Isaiah 61 and Psalm 1)

Whatever you think of trees clapping their hands, we as trees of righteousness certainly can and certainly should by and in His Spirit - to His glory.

The celestial city

Abraham is known for his faith. When the Lord told him, 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house to a land I will show you,' he packed up and went. He didn't know where he was going, he simply obeyed - this is faith, complete trust in the Lord. In Hebrews we are told he dwelt in the land of promise, as if in a foreign country.

But Abraham saw something far better on the horizon - he was waiting for the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God.

Like Abraham we share the same expectation. Jesus has prepared a place for us and we look forward to an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, here on earth, we are in our own land of promise if we are doing the same as Abraham - that is hearing and obeying the Lord when He speaks and leads us in the way He has prepared for us to go. Abraham prospered greatly - he was blessed in all things.

The keys to Abraham's life were faith, real trust in the Lord such that it was credited to him as righteousness; obedience to the voice of the Lord; and the belief that whilst he lived greatly blessed here on earth there was a better place - a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God to come.

We know from Revelation that this city, our future, is remarkable and it is filled with the glory of God. This is an inheritance beyond our imagination. The more we understand it the more it puts into perspective our time here on earth where things can change very quickly. Just now in eastern Europe we witness virtually overnight dramatic change. Nevertheless the promise of God and the eternal inheritance for all born again believers are unchanged.

We are yet to see how the things will work out but we remember Jesus warned of tribulations on earth - describing them as like birth pains.

We can be like Abraham after all he is described as the father of many nations - there would be many descendants. By placing our trust in the sacrificial work of Jesus removing the weight of our sin we immediately receive the same gift as Abraham - the gift of righteousness. We are born again and now that our eternal human spirit is born again we have a new Father. Now our future can be different. Like Abraham we can enjoy the promises of God - all it takes is to listen and obey. Then, even if everything seems to go wrong from time to time, we can look for the city whose foundations are built by the Lord God.

The days ahead are very unsure but this is certain - the Lord Jesus Christ, whose name is high above every other name, cares for each one of us and His plans for us are to give us a future and a hope - and then a place with Him in the celestial city.

I'm confident of this very thing

'Don' t cast away your confidence, which has great reward, for you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: for yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' Hebrews 10:35-38.

The writer to the Hebrews was urging the believing Jews not to draw back – and particularly not to go back to the law, as some were doing. But be those who believe to the saving (deliverance from danger) of our souls. Verse 39.

Our wonderful Lord Jesus has started a good work in each one who believes, and so being born again, has thus obtained the guarantee of eternal life. (John 3:16 and Ephesians 1:11-14)

He has started a good work in each one and will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6. This much is, as it were, 'set in stone.' The scripture says so and the scripture cannot be broken.

But what about the journey on earth? The Hebrews were warned not to turn or draw back because that is not the Lord's plan for us. His plan is to perfect, to establish, to strengthen, and to settle us. 1 Peter 5:10 And He will do it – just remain confident of the very thing, His word and His promise is Yes and Amen.

Troubled by anything – then don't be anxious, follow the biblical guide. 'In everything ... by prayer – that is speaking out loud to the Father; and supplication ... that is expressing your need; with thanksgiving ... that is the expression of gratitude; make your request be made known to God ... that is expressing to the Lord what you want Him to do for you.' (Philippians 4:6)

You will receive the peace of God that surpasses all understanding in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (verse 7)

His response will be by His grace and mercy as He explained to Paul when he was troubled by the thorn – My grace is sufficient – there will always be sufficient to help us to stand and to overcome. We don't consider ourselves elevated to the same level as Paul, so whilst we may all come under attack sometimes, it is highly unlikely that we would receive the enemies constant attention. And even if we did God's grace would always be abundant enough for every situation.

Let us be those who are confident of this very thing – that Jesus will always be there for us. Let's listen for the words from Him which bring faith . We can be confident in what He says to us (not what we imagine He says – but what He actually speaks) and we can stand and be confident in that and reap the fruit thereof, to His glory.

The world gets darker as we get closer to His return for us. Let us retain our confidence – He is here for us now and will take us to the place He has prepared for us at exactly the right time.

He has done all things well.

‘And they were astonished beyond measure saying, He has done all things well.’ (Mark 7:37) Jesus had just healed a man who was both deaf and mute. According to Jewish thinking, at the time, only the Messiah could cure one who was mute, just as only the Messiah could heal a leper. No wonder they were astonished. So everywhere Jesus went the multitudes flocked to Him always bringing the sick for His touch.

Just before this incident a gentile woman had sought Jesus asking Him to cast a demon out of her daughter. It seemed, at first, as if He would not, saying, ‘it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.’ Did the fact that the woman was a gentile mean Jesus would not act on her behalf or was He seeking to draw something more out of her? Her reply, ‘Yes Lord, even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs,’ was sufficient – Jesus acted and the daughter was freed.

The gentile woman had expressed her trust in Jesus – she knew He was able to answer her prayer and bold enough in her response. This is the way to approach the throne of grace – come boldly, just as we are instructed in Hebrews 4:16, for this where we will find grace and mercy to help in our times of need. The gentile woman was very clear in what she wanted Jesus to do – this too is the way for us when we need His help, be specific.

In chapter 6 of Mark's gospel Jesus has just fed 5,000 and there were 12 baskets left over. There is no shortage in Jesus economy. No need of ours is too great or too difficult for Jesus to deal with. The only thing that stands in the way is when we come doubting (double minded) or just asking for our own pleasures (James 1:6 and 4:3) Everywhere Jesus went they brought the sick to Him and He healed them like the dumb and mute man above. We can be sure that when we come to Jesus on behalf of others, our brothers and sisters, He is there for them, ready to answer our prayers. We always need to be listening for the Spirit may want to speak to us with some specific instruction as part of the answer.

We read, in 2 Chronicles 16, that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro looking for those to whom He can show His strength - those with loyal hearts. He is looking for opportunities to be good to us, His created beings. He is looking for a large body of people who will be able to declare, 'He has done all things well.'

Surely as we look back we can see many times when He has done well on our behalf, so let's hold on to that confidence. Jesus is not short of power and ability to answer our prayers, even when the world is in turmoil.

Christ in you the hope of glory

The New Covenant is this - now, in the person of the Holy Spirit, each one of us who has believed and has been born again has Jesus dwelling in our renewed human spirit. God, Himself dwelling within is bound to have a great deal of effect and impact. Let's briefly look at impact, past , present and future.

Past impact. Sins washed away. Transferred from death to life, put into right standing with the Lord God and entered into a living relationship with Him. It is all down to what Jesus has done and cannot be undone - for Paul , in writing to the Ephesians, tells us very clearly our newly acquired inheritance is guaranteed; and to Timothy advises that even if we become unfaithful He remains faithful - He cannot deny the deposit of the Holy Spirit He put in us.

Present impact. Now in a relationship with the Lord we can hear His voice and we can choose to follow His guidance and leading in everything. Now, when we face difficulties and have needs, we are invited to the throne of grace to find help and mercy from on high. Scripture tells us to come with gratitude and thanksgiving, to pray speaking out loud to the Lord expressing our need to Him, and to make our request. Ask (continuing present tense) and you will receive is the promise of Jesus.

The present impact is ongoing, every day, and is the working out of the deliverance from danger of our bodies and souls. Out of every situation we face He promises to bring good for us – this is the marvelous benefit of Christ in you the hope of glory.

Future impact. The glorious inheritance. Already Jesus has prepared a place for each and every born again believer. The time is fast arriving when we will be supplied with an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour , Jesus Christ. O glorious day when we rise to meet with Jesus in the air and so to be with Him for eternity.

As Jesus declared, not one that has been given to Him (born again) is lost. Nothing at all can separate us from the love of God - and nothing means nothing, not even ourselves!

With this triple level of wonderful benefits we wonder why every single human being doesn't believe in Jesus. Perhaps for some they don't know - but then we are told that there is no excuse because one only needs observe creation to know God exists. The principal answer is foolishness. Coming to Jesus and being born again makes a huge change - now righteousness in our actions becomes more and more important. Many just don't want to be answerable, glorifying God, in that way and prefer darkness.

For me and my house we rejoice, rejoice, and rejoice again. We revel in what Jesus has done for us, what He continues to do for us and for the wonderful future laid out for us, drawing us to love Him more and more.

The just shall live by faith

Luther was a very devout monk living in fear of the judgement of God whom he saw as a figure to be feared until ... In the early 1500's he was preaching and reading in Romans and came across verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1. Here the message was salvation for those who believe, bringing righteousness and the statement, 'the just shall live by faith.' Luther was struck to the core - it was so completely different from the official line of his church. A process had started and it led to what we call 'the reformation.' The world would never be the same again as the reformation took hold. There was massive opposition from the established church.

'The just shall live by faith,' quoted by Paul to the Romans, is a quote from the Old Testament, found in Habakkuk 2:4 'Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.'

And so it is today - the way of truth and life in all it's aspects is - by faith.

Faith can be looked at in two distinct levels. There is faith which is better called trust. In everything, day to day, we trust the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe the promise of the scripture that 'all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.' It being God's purpose that we are conformed to the image of Jesus. This is the context in which James

says, 'count it all joy when you fall into various trials.' The promise of God bringing good is sure and steadfast – it might not seem so at the time but nevertheless it is so. So the Hebrews are told, 'do not throw away your confidence (faith, trust in Jesus) which has great reward.' (10:35)

Then faith comes by hearing and hearing by every word that proceeds (is proceeding) from the mouth of God. This is truly mountain moving faith. We hear and agree with what the Lord speaks to us then all the power of heaven is there to bring it to pass, be it a small matter or a mountain sized matter.

So then in every part of daily life, whether it be at work or at leisure, we can live by faith – that is completely trusting the Lord in everything and listening for His voice and guidance. Thank you Lord for setting the reformation going through Luther!

The reformation sparked massive opposition. So we should not be surprised when living and acting by faith. There will be many, even regrettably some believers, who will oppose what we say and do. We will need wisdom and the Lord is not slow to provide it when we ask. He will give wisdom liberally – but ask in faith, for he who doubts is double minded and not in apposition to receive. (from James 1:5-8)

This is our message, the just shall live by faith – and it shall not be taken away from us.

Yes, No, maybe or maybe not

‘Let your yes be yes and your no be no,’ so we are instructed by Jesus in Matthew 5:37. Why, when we live in a world of ever changing values? Because this is what being made like Christ consists of – absolute truth and reliability.

Maybe or maybe not reflects peoples differing views of truth and the truth of the scriptures. There are many voices giving widely different views and meaning to the teaching of the scriptures. What can we believe? The bible itself has been handed down for nearly two thousand years and when evidence arises, such as from the scrolls found at Qumran, our copies of the handed down version are found to be very accurate indeed. This is in accordance with 1 Peter 1:25 ‘the word of the Lord endures forever.’ Jesus teaches us that ‘the scripture cannot be broken,’ recorded in John 10:35.

So here is our starting point – the scripture is God’s word, both reliable and trustworthy. In Proverbs we are told, ‘apply your heart to understanding’ and ‘lift up your voice for understanding.’ (2:2 and 3) We are advised that our attitude then is come to the scripture with the desire to know and understand what it teaches, and to cry out, lifting up our voices to God asking for understanding. This is the opposite of applying our own human thinking and interpreting the scripture with human wisdom instead of God’s wisdom which He will freely give when we ask. (James 1:5)

How to proceed? My way is to pray very often for more and more of God's truth. Sometimes this comes as I read the bible, sometimes as I study, sometimes as I just rest before the Lord and sometimes in direct response to a question – or even a mix as more and more understanding comes. It is challenging because the more we understand the more we have live accordingly. Yet that brings its own reward. The more our lives are aligned with truth the stronger becomes our trust in Him, and though we may suffer more in the way of opposition and attacks from the enemy, we also discover more and more grace available to us in times of need.

'Maybe it's this' or 'maybe it's that,' is double mindedness. James reminds us that a double minded man, one who doubts, cannot expect to receive anything from the Lord and is unstable. Our view of the scripture is therefore fundamental to our stability in life.

As Paul wrote to Timothy, 'scripture is good for what we believe (doctrine), for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness – *so that we may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

So may I ask you – are you a yes is yes, no is no person, or a maybe, maybe not person, in your ways and particularly in your attitude to God's word? Asking for more and more understanding is a lifetime project!

Solid ground or sinking sand?

Where do you stand? Is your foundation secure? Are you on solid ground?

When asked by Jesus, 'who do you say that I am?' Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus then speaks with a 'play on words' - 'You are Peter (*Petros, literally small stone*) and on this rock (*petra, literally mass of rock*) I will build My church.' Was Jesus going to build His church on the person of a small stone or on the mass of rock - Peter's declaration of faith - You are the Christ the Son of God?

Yes - Peter was greatly used and was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven - but he was not the rock - indeed He proved to be fallible when in the courtyard of the High Priest he denied Jesus three times.

Jesus Himself is The Rock - and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. He is the chief cornerstone - the One who holds things together. We fall on Him and are broken but if He falls on unbelievers they are ground to powder. So in our state of being broken from reliance on ourselves, we can instead stand on the solid ground - the Rock that is Jesus. The nature of the solid ground is fully described for us in the scripture.

Peter made a 'declaration of faith' and we find in the New Testament many instances when people did likewise. The woman who suffered a flow of blood for many years knew she just had to touch Jesus and she would be healed – this was her declaration of faith. She touched Him and was healed. The woman whose daughter suffered from demon possession made her declaration of faith, 'even the little dogs under the table eat from children's crumbs.' Her daughter was delivered that very hour.

A father whose son was demon possessed brought his son to the disciples - they could not heal him. Jesus told him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.' The father of the boy cried out, 'Lord, I believe help my unbelief.' The boy was delivered.

We can be like these examples varying from certainty to unbelief. When we are real with the Lord and call on His help deliverance is there for us. Jairus came to Jesus, his 12 year old only daughter was dying. Jesus would come, but whilst He was coming news came to Jairus that the girl had died. Jesus said to him, 'Do not be afraid, only believe, and she will be made well. And she was!

What we believe is very important – is it rock or is it the sinking sand of doubt? The more we get to know and love Jesus and to know and love the truth the more we will be standing on rock in our daily lives. Please join me in my constant prayer, 'Holy Spirit please fill me again and again with more and more love for Jesus and love for the truth.'

Got an itch?

Paul has just told Timothy that the God breathed scripture is good and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness, so that we may be complete, that is perfectly fitted, thoroughly equipped for every good work. That includes being perfectly fitted and equipped for our calling whether it be running a large business or a corner shop, or running a hospital, or a home - a safe place for the family to live and grow in. For every walk of life the scripture given by God is able to fully equip us.

The scripture is God's instrument for teaching us His ways and His desires - it is able to make us a perfect fit for life here whatever we are called to do. As a perfect fit, then the Spirit can and will bring specific guidance leading and helping us along, He will never contradict scripture.

As one should expect there will be opposition - we expect it from unbelievers, from the hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places as described by Paul in Ephesians 6 and from the world and its ways and lusts. Perhaps we don't expect opposition from ourselves - though we should, as our own flesh, body and soul, are set against the Spirit.

Having just told Timothy how good the scriptures are he urges him to preach, to teach, convince, exhort and rebuke. Because, because people can get an itch, yes an itch to draw them away from the sound doctrine.

That itch will be their own desires – what they want to believe rather than the sound doctrine of the God breathed scripture. Lovely born again and even Spirit indwelt believers are at risk of their own desires!

Then danger! There are teachers who will speak to their itch, to their own desire of what they want the ‘truth’ to be – and following these who teach such things they will be led astray to error and to fables, to things which are not true and not good to equip them for every good work.

None of us are exempt, we are all at risk of interpreting scripture to fit our desires of what we want it to say. A problem is that we want to be able to determine what we believe and want to be ‘truth’ rather than be subject to the real truth – for that requires humility. No surprise then that Peter tells us ‘no prophecy (that is speaking forth the mind and counsel of God) of scripture is of anyone’s private interpretation. (This became a significant problem in the early days of the church when the pagan concept of allegory took hold and led to Gnosticism - the pretence of hidden mysteries that would lead to the true god.)

We have the promise of the Spirit leading us into all truth – He can and will help us as we call on Him to lead us into all truth, it is His job! Ask and keep asking and keep asking – the more we are built up in the truth the safer our daily walk, and don’t forget humility.

Bless your enemies

There will always be people who offend or who outright attack us one way or another in all or any part of normal life here on earth. The big question is then how do we act and if appropriate respond?

The situation will test our faith and our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Natural man likes to hit back - that is a normal response. But we who are born again have become more than just natural man. Because we have indwelling us the Holy Spirit we are able to act in a way empowered by God's goodness.

Our natural way would be 'an eye for an eye' but Jesus way is 'I tell you do not resist an evil person.' This is contrary to what our natural man, our flesh, wants to do - so it takes a deliberate act of the will to make the choice not to resist. But Jesus goes further. 'If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.' That is go further than not resisting him or her but add a blessing .

Being good Christians we turn to God in prayer - but how do we pray? Is it Lord please stop this person, Lord please judge his or her actions, Lord please intervene on my behalf? Will the Lord answer prayers which are self centred - for our benefit?

Paul writing to the Romans (12:20) advises: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink. For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Paul is quoting Proverbs (25:22) which goes on to say, 'and the Lord will reward you.'

Paul continued with, 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' This is the biblical principle.

People acting as if they were enemies, and that includes other Christians, are acting in an evil manner – they may think they are justified but by not following the way of the Lord, the way of truth they err. When we pray for them to be blessed we bring the positive effect of the word of God which is 'living and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword' into play.

Recently we had just such an example. I had installed a row of concrete bollards at the front of our property to protect the edge of the road. Someone took to overthrowing the bollards for no apparent reason. Each morning when walking the dog I would look to see if he or her had struck again. It was happening two or three times a week and continued for many weeks. I prayed regularly asking the Lord to stop him. Eventually I changed my prayer to 'Lord bless him' – then within two days it completely stopped.

The moral of this is simple, 'apply the truth, pray blessing for those who persecute us and the power of God will come into the situation on our behalf.'

Vision

The English word has a number of meanings. There is the ability to see with our eyes; the ability to consider and think about and plan the future, that is a mental image of what the future could be like and the experience of seeing something in a dream or trance. Each has an important part to play. The most important thing for every human being is to come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Coming to believe - our eyes can see God's creation and according to Paul's letter to the Romans the fact that we can see His creation leaves us with no excuse for not believing in Him.

Coming to believe - we might be the recipient of a vision. That was my experience when aged 17. In a vision Jesus appeared to me saying Peter I want you to give Me your life - I did.

Coming to believe - our mental capacity to think and consider can be used to explore, that is to seek out to know about Jesus. For some that would start with asking Him if He exists!

Vision for the future is very important. In our spiritual terms we can understand that what we see and want for our futures should be aligned to our calling in God. Paul again writing to the Corinthians, 'Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.' (Until and if the Lord tells you clearly to make a change.) This is why my whole working life was as an accountant.

Why is that important? Because, 'For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.' God has a calling for each one and it here working in His calling that His gifts, His blessing and His anointing will be manifest. Being irrevocable means that what God says and thinks regarding what He calls us to do will remain as His best for us even if we ignore it and go our own way.

Sometimes we see those who so want to do something for God that they follow a 'spiritual' path - such as becoming a missionary or something similar. Without the calling of God no fruit is produced because God's gift and calling were elsewhere.

From what we have said already we can see that it is not a case of us needing or trying to bless God in some way - rather it is a case of our obedience to His calling for us. There He will work with us. His anointing will do for and with us that which our flesh cannot achieve - to His glory. His gifts can bring advice and guidance from heaven, to our benefit and to His glory. His blessing will make our lives fruitful - again to His glory.

Let us be those who can testify to the blessing and the anointing and the gifts of God manifesting in our working lives whatever calling He has for us. As we freely testify of the things He has done with us and for us others will be encouraged too.

Resist and keep resisting

There can be times of intense pressure. Times to dig deep into the truth of God's word and the power of His Spirit. The pressure can be natural and the result of circumstances. Then we need God's wisdom in what to do and His strength within to carry it through. Wisdom comes when we ask for it. The strength within is always present but we often need to remind ourselves. Just like Paul we have the indwelling Holy Spirit - 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'
Philippians 4:13

The pressure can be spiritual. This is where we are under attack from the enemy. We are called to stand against all the wiles of the principalities and powers and the host of wickedness that are against us and against all things of the Kingdom of God. Yet though they seem strong the truth is that He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world. 1 John 4:4 This is the truth .

When we read Ephesians 6 we see that God has provided all the armour we need to be able to stand and we are encouraged to take up the armour and to stand and when we have done everything to continue to stand. That is not standing in our own strength - rather, 'My brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.'

Action by us is required to stand, and one might need to call on someone who is like minded to stand with us. The point being that continual resistance is called for until James 4:7 is fulfilled - 'resist the devil and he will flee from you.' 'Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.'

The promise of God is that He will perfect, establish, strengthen and settle us after we have suffered a while. 1 Peter 5:10 'Suffered a while,' yes because it requires effort to resist the efforts of the powers of evil. Nevertheless, don't give up - 'Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.' 2 Corinthians 2:14.

We can find ways to help us to stand. Again it will take effort - but we can praise and worship, even through gritted teeth. We can pray in our native language and we can pray in tongues. We can read the scripture. We can make declarations of selected scriptures. The important thing is to resist and to keep resisting and to keep resisting.

Our enemy knows that his time is now short and is active to cause as much trouble for us as he can - much of the trouble is when he feeds things into our minds. These are always his main weapon - lies and more lies. Resist with the truth, 'God is for us who can be against us'. Romans 8:31

Whatever we go through we know that 'all things work together for good to those who love God.' Romans 8:28

The end of the road

The end of the road is the place where everything seems to be lost. The things one does and the prayers one makes which have availed in the past now seem powerless. What is left? Has the Lord God left us alone and surrendered us to the enemies that surround? It might seem that is the case.

But. Within us is the Holy Spirit who tells us that He is still there and He knows and He has plans for us for good and it is His promise that He will bring good out of every situation for us because we love Him. It just doesn't seem like it to our mortal beings - and it will turn out that it is because there are things we don't understand. The Lord is working for His glory and that means changing us from one degree of glory to another. That means things will unfold accordingly. It just seems like the end of the road, but it is not, for the road is eternal and has no end. Indeed we know from His word that there is an inheritance ahead which defies our understanding.

And in the midst of the difficulty the Lord still works His miracles. We pray for a neighbour and she is mightily blessed and enabled to return to work. A friend comes to demonstrate his new 'toy.' A small drone. He gets it stuck 80 or more feet up in a large oak tree. Naturally speaking it is hopeless. His wife is confident things will work out. We pray, though we doubt that the Lord is interested in a small drone. We even ask for angels to bring it down!

Our friend comes with a huge catapult – he is going to try to dislodge it. But stops and decides to look under the thick hedge and there it is on the ground under the hedge. How it got from 80 feet up down through all the foliage and branches and then under the thick hedge defies any natural logic. But there it is, his wife's confidence has been justified. Our friend's well being, not the drone, was the Lord's concern.

So at the end of the road there are two choices – we can completely give up or we can rest in the certainty of God's word. His word which He has protected and has been handed down through the ages simply cannot fail because God Himself cannot fail. And still He shows Himself through the things exemplified above. We hope for what we do not see – His deliverance from our current troubles. We eagerly wait with perseverance - for He is faithful, even if we are not. We do not throw away our confidence, as we endure we will receive the promise. The end of the road is a hard place, but this is a faithful saying:

Whatever we go through we know that 'all things work together for good to those who love God.' Romans 8:28

Breakthrough

David had just been anointed King over Israel and the Philistines heard of it and searched for him. So David enquired of the Lord, 'shall I go up against the Philistines?' Will You deliver them into my hand?' The Lord answered, 'Go up for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand.' So David went at Baal Perazim and there he defeated them. David exclaimed, 'the Lord has broken through my enemies before me, like a breakthrough of water.'

The Philistines rallied and deployed themselves in the valley of Rephaim (giants.) David enquired again of the Lord. This time the Lord said, 'you shall not go up: circle round behind them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees. When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the trees advance quickly. For then the Lord will go out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines.'

There are times when we need a breakthrough from the Lord. The problem is beyond us, we need Him to act. Wisely David enquired from the Lord and very wisely he followed the Lord's instructions and there was a breakthrough. In itself that breakthrough was a battle rather than the whole war, for the Philistines rallied and threatened again. Very wisely David enquired again and did not repeat the previous strategy. This time the Lord's plan was different. Again following the word from the Lord David had victory over his enemy.

When we need a breakthrough, for the problem is greater than us, we can enquire of the Lord. We can listen for His answer – it may need patience which is difficult when we are under threat. But scripture assures us that we will receive an answer – ‘ask (and keep asking) and it will be given to you. For everyone who asks receives.’ (Matthew 7:7 and 8)

The apostle Peter confirms that the breakthrough will come in his first letter. Be humble under the mighty hand of God, cast all your care on Him, be sober and vigilant. The devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Resist him and stand firm in the faith. Then after you have suffered a while the God of all glory will give you the breakthrough – He will perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you.’ (from 1 Peter 5:6-11)

Paul wrote to the Ephesians telling them to stand and when they had done everything to keep standing – always looking out for the sword of the Spirit - that specific word (rhema) from God, that instruction just like David received when he enquired of the Lord. Our breakthrough comes in the same way – ask, listen and obey the specific instruction, not relying on previous victories for God’s strategy is always right for every problem. Patience is needed!

Why is patience needed? Because patience is having its perfect work in us. Patience is abiding under pressure – enduring. So we keep standing and waiting for the breakthrough which will surely come at the right time.

Spiritual sacrifices

‘You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ 1 Peter 2:5

Even every day this process is continuing – we are living stones in God’s spiritual house. My place of work, my home are building sites - at work, at home I am being built into the spiritual house the Lord is building. And this is for His glory. My sacrifice is that I willingly give up my rights, my ideas and my desires and exchange these poor things for His purposes and desires for my life.

Why would I give up my own ideas and desires? Because I have come to know for sure that the Lord God is both Shepherd and Overseer of my soul – and, of course, He is perfect as both Shepherd and as Overseer. Jesus said, ‘My sheep know My voice.’ The Perfect Shepherd leads His sheep for their own good and for His glory. He knows exactly what is both right and best. So it is both good and sensible to give up one’s own ideas and to follow the Shepherd.

Even so, we do go astray from time to time. We are drawn aside by temptations, by situations, by others and by the desires of our own flesh. Fortunately for us the Good Shepherd goes after the lost sheep that has gone astray.

He lovingly draws us back to Himself, leading us to repent of our errors and cleansing us from all unrighteousness – there is always a new start available, even from seeming disaster.

Because Jesus made the ultimate spiritual sacrifice He is able to save to the uttermost. This is the working of genuine love. Jesus tells us to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength because this is the safest place for us – to be in love with Son of God, our bridegroom to be. Being in love with anyone requires sacrifice. Genuine love is by definition considering the one loved more important than oneself. Just as a human bride attaches herself to her husband to love and obey, so we are betrothed to Jesus to love Him and to follow Him.

Following Jesus is to be led by the Holy Spirit – it is His job to bring us the words of Jesus and to lead us. The presence of the Holy Spirit within is Jesus' gift to us and the guarantee of our coming inheritance. Our inheritance to come is beyond our imagination in its glory, and the entrance into this everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to us, when our sojourn on earth is complete. Our spiritual sacrifices will prove to have been very well worthwhile as we reap a rich harvest of His presence in the everlasting kingdom.

On earth part of our spiritual sacrifice is to walk in the good works that He has prepared beforehand for us – the Spirit will be our always present help if we follow and are led by Him.

Every high thing

Paul, writing to the Corinthians, instructs them about the almighty power of our Lord God for daily living. Paul comes by the meekness and gentleness of Christ to say that we are in a spiritual war against strongholds, arguments and high things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. Our weapons are not carnal but mighty in tearing down these things – by bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Jonah was instructed to go and preach repentance to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, a totally godless city whose sins had come before the Lord for judgement – but he didn't want to go. His reluctance led to this one specific sign - our Messiah would be in the tomb for three days and three nights. When Jonah did go and preach the city repented in sackcloth and ashes and judgement was withheld.

But! Within a hundred or so years Nineveh had forgotten its great revival and deliverance and was back to its evil ways. Now its sins came before the Lord for judgement again. The Lord sends Nahum – the warning is given and ignored. Nineveh is no more - destroyed by the Babylonians.

We can look back over our lives and see great victories even though many times we may have fallen short of the glory of God. Being born again when we first believed sealed our eternal destiny – regardless of our subsequent failures – the Lord remains faithful! This is victory.

In life we are called to live righteously in all we do – but we are constantly under pressure and attack from enemy strongholds, arguments and high things. These forces, described in Ephesians 6:12, are spiritual hosts of evil working with lies as their weapons.

Our safeguard is the truth to counter and dismiss the lies of the enemy. God has given us His word, breathed out by Him in the scripture – we do well to immerse ourselves in the truth. Joshua was told to be strong and courageous for the battles he faced. He was told, ‘Do not let the book of the Law depart from your mouth’ – that was the covenant he was under. For us our New Covenant was revealed in detail to Paul and the Apostles. The principle is the same – we are not to let the book of our covenant depart from our mouths.

It can be very very easy to slip into the ways of the world in daily life. Jesus described the way of truth and righteousness as the narrow way, ‘Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.’

Through life we are told to follow the ways of Jesus, which Paul described as meekness and gentleness, within which we can have confidence and boldness. Boldly we are invited to come to the throne of grace. Coming to this balance of meekness, gentleness, confidence and boldness is an objective of the Christian life, by which we can cast down every high thing.

Helpless, hopeless and love

It shouldn't happen to any believer but there can be times when things just don't go right for whatever reason. Faith, that is trust in the Lord, can be sorely tested especially when answers to prayer seem to be delayed such that hope is diminished.

Hope is the certainty of blessing and faith or trust is the title deed, the evidence of things hoped for. Faith and hope are two of the vital aspects of Christian belief that are said to remain in 1 Corinthians 13.

What does one do when everything seems to conspire against one's trust and one's hope? What is left to help us though the darkest moments? The answer is the third and greatest of the three aspects Paul describes in 1 Corinthians. In military terms it is a bit like bringing out the greatest and most powerful weapon. God's love for us cannot be extinguished for by the Holy Spirit He dwells within. Our love for Him can come under great strain but that too cannot be extinguished for the same reason - it dwells inside our human spirit. True at the level of our minds and emotions it may be greatly subdued at times.

What then to do - decide to walk and to operate in love. Firstly with the Lord God Himself, thus fulfilling the greatest commandment. Taking time to sit with the Lord and to talk to Him is a good place to start. He invites us to express our needs to Him for He has the intention of pouring out His mercy and grace.

Expressing our love to those closest to us is another excellent place to be and being loving to all we come across will demonstrate His Kingdom and His ways.

When the enemy closes in and seems to block our every path we can remember to resist every evil pressure, humbling ourselves and casting all our cares on the Lord. Know that we are not alone in coming under the pressure of our enemies efforts to rob, kill and destroy – but be vigilant and steadfast. Know this for a certainty because the Lord breathed this out through Peter, ‘The God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while will, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you – to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.’ 1 Peter 5:6-11

Our problems and pressures can seem to go on the ever, but this is the promise of the Lord, ‘God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted (same word as tested) beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.’ 1 Corinthians 10:13

Of these things we can be sure because even when we are unfaithful He remains faithful – He cannot deny Himself – that is His Holy Spirit dwelling within.

We need patience and then more patience whilst God’s good pleasure is worked out and we see His glory.

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Pass it on

One of the great calls of the gospel is this - 'Pass it on.' Pass on the good news whenever you have the opportunity and the Spirit urges. Pass on the miracle power of the Lord whenever you have the opportunity and the Spirit urges. This is part of living our faith - that others may see and benefit. It is not a work of our strength, our power, our ability - but when the Spirit urges us to speak or act, then His power will accomplish whatever the Lord wishes to accomplish, through us.

The gospel is 100% the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through grace and mercy He will, as and when He chooses, work through us - to Him be the glory. There is nothing for us to boast about, though we may see miracles, small and great. He chooses us to work with Him and through Him in the proclamation, declaration and demonstration of His gospel - not that He has to, but He chooses to.

Evangelism has always been high on the church agenda, as it should be. However, 'in the Spirit' is the key methodology - as and when and how the Spirit directs would save a lot of wasted effort!

And so it is life and business. Following our calling, as the Spirit directs, would save a lot of loss and wasted time as our own ideas fail to bear fruit.

The aim of the gospel is to bear fruit. That is salvation of souls, of course, and much more. When Jesus went to the cross He dealt with sin so we could be set free from judgement and be filled with righteousness. He also carried our pains and sicknesses so that through faith and patience we are healed. The gift of and filling with His Spirit is to empower us for the good works He has prepared beforehand. In the full knowledge of each one of us He prepared good works for you and for me. It is here in these things He has prepared we find the anointing and His power. What a joy it is to see His hand working with us and for us even in the matters of daily life.

And so it has been with word for the week. Every week I have known the guidance of the Spirit in what to bring and what to write. Now it is time to pass on the baton - to pass it on for someone else to take up the running. As I look back It has been a joy to know the leading of the Lord. (There are already 3 volumes each of 52 'Word for the Week' encouraging episodes now available on Amazon.)

So I sign off with this thought and prayer, that you may be thoroughly blessed in all you do, that you may know the Lord Jesus in greater and greater measure and that you may bear much fruit.

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