

# Unveiling... Being Full of Life

Does it sound like we're  
our credentials, asserting  
do we need letters of endorse-  
ment? You are all the endorsement at you.  
anyone can read by just looking at you.  
but with God's living Spirit, not chiseled  
lives — and we publish it.  
We couldn't be more sure of ourselves  
Christ himself for God, are our letter of  
think of writing this kind of letter about our-  
a letter. His letter authorizes us to help carry  
The plan wasn't written out with ink on paper, with  
footnotes, killing your spirit. It's written with Spirit  
lives!

## LIFTING THE VEIL

The Government of Death, its constitution chiseled on stone tablets, was so  
a dazzling inaugural, Moses' face as he delivered the tablets was so bright  
that day (even though it would fade soon enough) that the people of Israel  
could no more look right at him than stare into the sun. How much more  
dazzling, then, the Government of Condemnation was impressive, how about  
Government of Affirmation? Bright as that old makeshift arrangement  
look downright dull alongside this new one. If that makeshift government  
impressed us, how much more this brightly shining government!

With that kind of hope to excite us, nothing holds us back. Unlike  
Moses, we have nothing to hide. Everything is out in the open with us. It  
wore a veil so the children of Israel wouldn't notice that the glory was  
notice it now, don't notice that there's nothing left behind that veil. Know  
today when the proclamations of that old, bankrupt government are  
out, they can't see through it. Only Christ can get rid of the veil so they can  
see for themselves that there's nothing there.

Whenever, though, they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes  
the veil and there they are — face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that  
God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. And when  
God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is  
recognized as obsolete. We're free of it! All of us! Nothing between us and  
God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are trans-  
figured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and  
more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

Lynette Woods

# Unveiling... Being Full of Life

*by Lynette Woods*



*Other titles:*

Unveiling... Vignettes of Life

Unveiling... Lessons from Life

Unveiling... Portraits of Life

Unveiling... Life, But Not As We've Known It

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# Being a Testimony

As any lawyer will tell you, the most important thing about a testimony is that you testify to something that you personally have witnessed, experienced, seen and heard. A judge and jury don't want to hear about what you think, what you have read, what someone else has told you, what you think you're expected to say, or even what you believe to be true; they want to hear about what *you have actually seen and know to be true from your own experience*. That is what a testimony is.

In religious circles, a "testimony" is usually about how bad you were until you discovered God, started going to church, became a "good Christian" and supposedly lived happily ever after. And usually the worse the person was, the "better" and the more sensational the "testimony" is considered to be. Unfortunately, these "testimonies" can be more about what the person did and what has been seen and experienced physically here in this world, than what has been genuinely seen and experienced spiritually outside of this world...

I recently read the testimony of a man who had been promiscuous, a drug addict, and drug dealer who ended up in prison where he reached the end of his rope and turned to God. Whenever I hear testimonies like that, I feel as though my own story is pretty boring because I was always so "good". But although I can't talk about being saved from being "bad" according to this world's definition, I *can* testify about being saved from being "good". And yes, I truly did need rescuing from my "goodness", such as it was!

It is far more difficult to be rescued from being good than from being bad, because when you (and others) believe that you are doing all the right things and that you are inherently good, you can't see that you are really self-righteous and proud. Goodness doesn't seem bad to us, but as they say, "good" is the biggest enemy of "best".

So what is my testimony? In a sentence: My testimony is simply one of being brought from death to Life!

## **My Life as a "Good Christian"**

I had a very privileged upbringing in Christian terms, I was born in New Zealand, began school in Australia while my parents attended Missionary Training College in Tasmania, and grew up on the mission field in the jungles of Borneo where my parents were church planting missionaries with an interdenominational faith mission. My brother and I helped them in their work in the villages and even as a teenager I never rebelled, I did everything "by the book". I "asked Jesus into my heart" when I was just 3 years old. When I was 5 I had a dream in which I saw myself going up a ladder into heaven and God giving me gifts that I then took back down to earth to give others. It is the only dream I remember from my childhood.

From the age of 7 I remember sensing God with me and talking with Him. I was a sickly child and suffered from asthma, eczema and many allergies. A doctor told my parents that they shouldn't be taking me to the tropics, but they knew that God had called them there and trusted that He would take care of me. We moved to Indonesia when I was 8 years old, and all of my symptoms began to disappear. I never had another attack of asthma, most allergies disappeared, and the hot, humid environment was the best solution for my skin condition.

On the day we arrived in Borneo we flew straight to the small missionary children's boarding school that my brother and I would be attending. My parents were with us for a few days and then we were left in a strange country, with strange people... they were Americans (please excuse the humour, I really do love Americans)! Being left at boarding school and not seeing my parents for months at a time was something I always found hard.

When I was 10 I asked God to prove to me whether the Bible really contained His words or not, and He totally convinced me. Throughout my childhood I saw God continually supply all that we needed. My parents were part of a faith mission whose policy was to never make appeals for money or tell people what you needed, but to make your needs known only to God and allow Him to provide. Because of this I witnessed God providing for us time and time again, often miraculously.

I returned to live in New Zealand when I was 18 and my parents went

back to the mission field once more. When I was 19 I prayed for a friend who had a lump on her wrist and it disappeared. When I was 20 I prayed for a woman (I didn't know her) who had collapsed in a meeting and an emergency crew was called in. After working on her they said she was dead. As I was praying for her I felt something stronger than myself rise within me, which made me declare out loud that it wasn't her time to die and she was going to live, and she did. The pastor of her church said it was because I had prayed that she lived, but it was because *God intervened* that she lived! It is about time that people realised that just because God speaks or works through someone, *this does not mean that He endorses that person or thing* (or donkey....in the case of Balaam in the Bible)! He can, and does, use many different means.

When I was 21 I met my husband Mike at a Youth For Christ camp where we were both leaders of groups of young people. Ten days before our wedding, we were in a car accident. My eyelid was so badly lacerated that they thought I would need a skin graft and there was concern about saving the eye. When the plastic surgeon was told that we were soon to be married, he decided to try his best at stitching me up instead of doing a skin graft. It took quite a few hours, but he did a great job, and my vision was fine; we were married on schedule.

As a young couple we considered going to Bible school (because that's what seriously committed Christians do) but thankfully, God prevented us. He had another "school" in mind for us! I followed my career in computer graphics, and Mike followed his career in the education sector. When I was 27, due to being a new mother, losing my income, and having recently moved into our newly built home, we owed quite a sum of money to a company. We received the final notice and after praying about what to do about it, I felt God say that I was to write out a cheque for the amount we owed and post it, even though we didn't have the money in our bank account. So I did. The very next day in the post we received a totally unexpected cheque (I think it was a tax rebate) which completely covered the amount!

When I was 30, anyone looking on would have thought we had it made: we were a healthy young couple with two beautiful young children. We were living in a stunning architecturally designed home on top of a hill in our capital city with great views out over the sea. We were active in our



church where I was in leadership. And then something happened which changed my whole life. Many of my closest friends won't know all these other details about my life, but they DO know about this, because to me those other things are not *nearly* as important as what happened to me at this time; it was life-changing and completely eclipses everything else in my life. But absolutely nothing happened that you could see outwardly. It was inwardly that *everything changed*: God brought me to Life.

### **A Change of Heart and Life**

Now, remember that I was a "good" Christian: I had done, and was doing, all the right things. I had all the knowledge of Christianity. I knew, read and taught the Bible. I went to church regularly, as well as many other meetings, and we were leaders in the church. But then God began to open my eyes... and I saw things I'd never seen before. God is always after *truth and reality* and truth and reality is what He required from me. I saw the truth: that I was rotten to the core, and my being good, doing all the right things, and my "righteousness" meant absolutely nothing. There is only One who perfectly pleases God: His Son. I cried many tears because I saw how self-sufficient and proud I had been. I was a hypocrite and I did not deserve this new Life that God was now breathing into me...

With my eyes opened here is what I saw: I thought I had been a very good born-again Christian; a totally committed, Spirit-filled follower of Jesus Christ, when I really was a spiritually promiscuous drug addict and drug dealer. The drug that I was hooked on was "Christianity": things about Christ instead of Christ Himself; a religion instead of a relationship. I was addicted to the Christian religion and going to church and everything about church (as most Christians are); it was my life... and that is a very telling statement. I had to get my regular fix of it every week. And I sold it to others as if it would solve all their problems. The church was in the place of Christ in my life; it was my god. I had been a spiritual prostitute. I had loved many church bodies instead of one Body: Christ. These churches and the people in them had been my focus and my loves instead of Christ. I had no idea that I needed saving from myself and from my religion.

Now you may think that isn't very bad. That's not as bad as being a "real" prostitute or drug dealer, you may say... Well, let me ask you this: which

is more important in terms of eternity, your physical life or your spiritual life?

Of course it is your *spiritual* life because our physical life ceases to exist after just a short period of time, but your spirit will live on forever. So what is believed and done by us spiritually now, has eternal ramifications.

Just as Saul of Tarsus thought that he had been doing exactly what God wanted, so did I. And just as he needed to be struck down by the Light of Christ to see what he was doing and who Jesus Christ really is, so did I. Each of us needs a Damascus Road experience to show us *who He really is, and who we really are*. This experience of Him will do what nothing else can ever do: it will completely turn us around so that we can never go back to what we were before. Why? Because we have SEEN and we have HEARD! Once you have seen something you cannot un-see it; you've SEEN! My testimony is that God not only can, but DOES save and rescue people from themselves, from this world, and from religion. Death completely separates us from those we love and it is exactly the same with spiritual death - it separates God from those He loves: US. We are all spiritually dead (which means being separated from God) until He breathes His Life into us. He loves us so much and desires to have a close relationship with us as a Father has with His children, but that relationship and intimacy is not possible unless we are alive to Him, born from above as His children with His Life in us.

T. Austin-Sparks wrote, "Religion can be the greatest enemy of God's true thought, because it is Satan's best deception... If we were writing a treatise, we could show that what is called 'Christianity' is really the greatest enemy of Christ." And what a miracle it is that God saved me from that great enemy! The Bible became a new book overnight; it was full of meaning and full of Life as God Himself taught me from it, often teaching me things that were the opposite of what I had been taught. I couldn't believe how clearly He has put things in the Bible and yet how I hadn't seen it, it had all been veiled from me! He began to strip me of everything I had been taught by man and instead taught me His Way, Truth and Life Himself.

Thankfully, God was dealing with both Mike and I at the same time in similar ways, so we were both hearing the same thing and were prepared



to do whatever God asked of us. The very last thing we expected Him to do was ask us to leave the church, but that was the best test ever of whether we really trusted Him or not. In many ways we were very naive; we were just doing what we had heard God tell us to do: leave the church. We didn't expect to be attacked and maligned by our "church family" because of this, although in hindsight we should have expected it! We had never heard of anybody being called out of the church before, but we trusted God in this, even though at the time we didn't even know *why* He was telling us to leave. All we knew was that we had to make that first step and then He would show us what was next. What was next wasn't easy, but was necessary... it was a baptism of fire.

We began to see some of the reasons why God told us to leave the church and it was not a pretty picture. Mercifully, this didn't all come at once, it was a progressive thing, and the more we saw, the more we were released from the bondage and addiction that religion had in our lives. Seeing can be a very painful thing, because you see the good as well as the bad. At one point I was crying to God, saying that it was just too painful. He asked me if I would rather not see... I realised that I had a choice: there was a cost to seeing, and I decided that I wanted to see, no matter what it cost. I wanted the truth at all costs. In the language of The Matrix, I was being offered the red pill (an excellent illustration of this is given here: [www.awildernessvoice.com/Matrix.html](http://www.awildernessvoice.com/Matrix.html)).

When Paul saw the truth, he was a changed man. Nothing but God could have changed him so drastically and delivered him from the clutches of religion. He was hounded by the very religion he had previously served. He had to run for his life. Religion is always out to kill Christ and His Life and it is no different today than it was two thousand years ago... and we had our own experience of this when God called us out of the church. It was a very difficult time and that is another story in itself! We felt like contagious lepers and none of those who we had thought were our friends in the church stayed in contact with us. We were outcasts and so we learned about life with Jesus "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13).

### **The Journey Onward and Upward**

When I was 33 our beautiful 6 year old daughter poured boiling hot water onto her face and chest. Layers of her skin were peeling off... she

suffered second degree burns on her face and chest. We were having a break in a remote area with no telephone, so we had to use a neighbour's phone to call for an ambulance. The emergency doctor gave us pain killers to give her as needed. I stayed up most of the night praying for her. I would rather have been burned myself than have my child suffer and I realised just a little of how God felt in seeing His Son suffer on the Cross. Amazingly, my daughter slept fine, and needed NO pain killers whatsoever, not even the next day. She said that the burns didn't hurt; at all! That, to me, was such a miracle! After weeks of dressings, the doctors could not believe how well her skin had healed, to the point that there was no scarring whatsoever. This, on a girl who scars easily, and had a small scar on her cheek for years from the scratch of a playmate's fingernail at age 3!

A few months later, my husband, who had been very unwell for 9 months with something that the doctors couldn't diagnose, got to the point where he was so sick and weak that he could no longer keep any liquids down or get out of bed. I couldn't get him to the car so an ambulance took him to the hospital where they put him on a drip to rehydrate him. Finally they diagnosed his illness and proceeded to treat it, but in doing so, sent his body into shock with tonic-clonic seizures and he almost died. The doctors in the emergency room all left their patients to work on Mike who had a blood pressure of only 40/20. After a couple of days in ICU, he was a new man, they knew what was wrong with him (Addison's disease) and how to treat it. He was home in five days feeling the best he had felt in many months!

While Mike was sick we had put our house on the market. With Mike not able to work for months, and me at home with our two young children, we felt we needed to sell the house and pay off the mortgage in order to survive financially. We felt very at peace about this, in fact, God gave us great peace throughout the whole ordeal of Mike's sickness, to the point that our Doctor later apologised, saying that he had wrongly interpreted our peacefulness to mean that things weren't as bad as they really were!

When God had called us out of the church, we had also felt called to leave our home and country and were ready to sell our house. We thought that perhaps God was using Mike's sickness as the trigger to get the house sold. But it was on the market for six months with no buyer. So

with Mike recovered, we took it off the market again. A few months later, out of the blue someone knocked on our door to ask if the house was still for sale. On a date that was significant to us (it was the same date that God had told us we were to leave the church three years previously) they made a cash offer and we sold the house for the amount we had been asking!

By this time we had made friends online with others who had also heard God call them out of the church. They too, had also suffered the consequences. Strangely enough, none of them lived in our own country, they were all in the USA. We made our first trip to the States to meet some of these friends in 1999. We also set up the Unveiling website the same year in order to share some of the things that God had been showing us.

Two years later, when again on a visit to the USA, a friend showed us a couple of books by an author who had written many books between 1925 and his death in 1971, T. Austin-Sparks. We hadn't ever heard of him. After skimming through the books, I knew we just had to get them to read, as so much of what was written in them was *exactly* what God Himself had been teaching and showing us. It turned out that many of his books were available readily and for free. Upon receiving them, I devoured them! We had looked online for books by this author when we had first heard of him. However, we had found virtually nothing online. We felt that putting his messages onto a website was something that God was calling us to do. There were too many books to put on the Unveiling website, so we set up a website dedicated to his writings.

We had no idea how large this website would get, God in His wisdom prevented us from knowing that or we might never have started it! This website [www.austin-sparks.net](http://www.austin-sparks.net) now contains an online library of messages by T. Austin-Sparks and is available in several languages. Although the website takes a lot of my time and work, it has not felt like "work" at all because the messages are so full of the Life and Light of God that they are a delight to work with! In the "Other Authors" section of Unveiling.org, you will find messages from some other authors who featured in Mr Austin-Sparks' magazine, "A Witness and A Testimony".

When I was 40, something else happened that could only be God. We

moved to the USA for a term of four years. When God had called us out of the church 9 years before this, we had also felt that He was calling us out of our country of New Zealand, to go wherever He said. The place we felt He was calling us to go to was the USA. We felt ready to go, so we proceeded to "help God" make it happen and got our passports up to date. Then God clearly told us to wait. We had no idea why, and thought He must mean next year... We didn't know that it would be 9 years later, and it was best that we didn't know the wait would be that long! Like anything with God, trusting Him is the best policy. The way He got us there was far beyond anything we could have imagined: we were sent as diplomats to our Embassy in Washington DC. Arranging of visas, travel, accounts, housing etc. was all taken care of for us; we lived in accommodation rented for us in the name of the Queen of England, while we were living for the King of all kings! Even the job in the Embassy itself was a small miracle, as the job was a new position. Mike was selected out of quite a number of applicants.

Now, when I read through all this, it is quite a testimony to the many ways that God works. He has done so much for us and with us and through us... and yet, by far the greatest miracle and the greatest testimony of it all to me is not the many things He has done for us, but it is what He has done *in* us: reproducing His *Life*. This eternal and everlasting Life that is living in me every day is the greatest testimony and greatest miracle of all! This Life is the greatest testimony any one of us can possibly have. It was *this Life* that opened my eyes to see my true state and to see Him. It was *this Life* that not only saved me from that state of death, but is continuing to reclaim every part of me, replacing my old life with new Life.

Christ and His Life is my Life and my testimony; this is what I have seen and witnessed. It is Life... "but not as we've known it" because it is in the spiritual and not the physical realm. That phrase (which I have often used on Unveiling) is from Star Trek - "It's life Jim, but not as we've known it"! The phrase turns out to have been very appropriate. So much on this journey has been the *opposite* of what we had thought and expected, it has been "not as we've known it". It is an exciting journey of discovery!

If this Life is your testimony too, then I celebrate Him with you! And if not, then *please* be real and honest with yourself and with God. Give up on going your own way and ask Him to bring you into this Life that He is

longing to share with you, for you will never regret it! As Jesus Himself said, "I am the Door (the Way in) anyone who enters in through Me will be saved (will live). He will come in and he will go out [freely], and will find pasture. The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. *I came that they may have and enjoy Life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).*" (John 10:9-10 AMP). *This* is what we were born for: to be in close, intimate relationship with this One who loves us so very much and wants to share His Life, heart and mind with us. The God of this universe wants to be our friend, our love, our Life! That is so amazing and mind-blowing! This Life that He gives us propels us on into a life of continual unveiling as we discover: "Christ: The final frontier... our mission: to explore strange new worlds... to seek out new Life; to boldly go where no one has gone before!" And we say with Him: "Make it so!"

**The Word of Life existed from the beginning. We have heard it. We have seen it. We observed and touched it. This Life was revealed to us. We have seen it, and we testify about it. This is the Testimony: that God has given us His Life and this Life is in His Son. 1 John 1:1-2; 5:11**



# Being Called

**"By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go out into the place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and went out, not knowing where he was going." (Hebrews 11:8 NIV)**

Many of us are familiar with the Greek word "ekklesia" mistranslated as "church" in the Bible. Ekklesia means those called to an assembly or gathering, and did not ever mean a religious building! It is a composite of two Greek words, "ek" (out of or away from) and "kaleo" (called). We know that we are called out of religion and called out of Self and our ways of trying to please God. However, even if we have heard and obeyed the call to go out or come out, we also need to hear and heed the call to go in... We are not only those who are called out, but also those who are "called into". We are called into:

His own Kingdom and Glory (*1 Thess. 2:12*)  
His Eternal Glory (*1 Pet. 5:10*)  
One Body (*Col. 3:15*)  
Peace (*1 Cor. 7:15*)  
Freedom (*Gal. 5:13*)  
One Hope (*Eph. 4:4*)  
The marriage supper of the Lamb (*Rev. 19:9*).

We are also referred to simply as the "called" (*1 Cor. 1:24, Heb. 9:15, Jude 1 & Rev. 17:14*) and the "called of Jesus Christ" (*Rom. 1:6*) and "called according to His Purpose" (*Rom. 8:28*). Being called INTO can only happen when we have been obedient to the call out. Ekklesia is a compound of two words: "ek" (or ex, from which we get the word "exit") and a derivative of "kaleo" which means called, hence ek-kalesia: out-called. Called into is "eis" (into) or "en-kaleo" - in-called.

We sometimes talk about our "calling" and desire to know and discover what our calling in life is. Abraham had a calling and he, like us, was not only called OUT but also INTO: *"By faith Abraham, being called, (kaleo) obeyed to go OUT (ek-erchomai) INTO (eis) the place which he was to receive for an inheritance"*. Like Abraham, we too are being called to not

only go out of the land and leave the "country" we know and are familiar with, but we are also called INTO the Promised Land which is our inheritance and where there are many things that we are unfamiliar with and which seem new and different to us: *"he went, although he did not know or trouble his mind about where he was to go"* (Amplified Bible).

### **Called Out of Egypt**

The 'land' that we are called out of is presented to us as Egypt in the Old Testament. God told the Israelites: *"The land which you go in to possess is not like the land of Egypt, from which you came out, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your foot laboriously as in a garden of vegetables. But the land which you enter to possess is a land of hills and valleys which drinks the water of the rain of the heavens, a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. And if you will diligently heed My commandments which I command you this day - to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with your entire being - I will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil."* (Deut. 11:10-14).

Just as no physical church, place or ministry on this earth can be said to be "Egypt", so also no physical church, place or ministry can be viewed as the "Promised Land". God is now dealing primarily with the internal, unseen heart issues and not with externally seen places and things. When our hearts and motivations (the internal) are fully surrendered to God, then, and only then, can what comes forth from us (the external) truly be of God.

So what is our "calling" and what is this "place" we are called into? This Place is Christ. HE is our Promised Land, our Inheritance, and our Calling. We are not only called OUT of Egypt's slavery, religion and labour, but we are also called INTO Christ as our Rest, Inheritance and our Promised Land.

We know how much work it can take to make and maintain a garden for producing food, but those verses are saying that this labour is all in the past; that was to do with Egypt. Egypt was all about slavery and



bondage and working for and pleasing man - those who rule over us. The Promised Land is the place of Freedom and REST from all of that, it is the Place of God's provision. Christ is the Land of Abundance; He is the Source of all Life. But the process of apprehending and realising the reality of this in our personal experience can take years of transition, represented in the Bible as wandering in the wilderness even after having left Egypt...

### **Called Out of the Wilderness**

The wilderness was not a place devoid of God and His presence for the Israelites, it was a place where He proved Himself and did many miracles for them. So with us, His leading us out of Egypt and into the wilderness is important in order to rid us of the dependencies and securities that we have had in Egypt; now we must rely solely on God and on nothing of man's making or doing. There is nothing in the wilderness except for that which is made by and provided by God alone. And He is always faithful! The wilderness was not a place of barrenness for God's People, instead it was a place of amazing miracles. Where there was no water, God gave water. Where there was no food, God provided food. Where there was naturally no meat, God delivered meat. God proved Himself to the Israelites time and time again, and yet they still grumbled and complained and wanted to go back to Egypt and often we do exactly the same thing. We have to learn that we are called OUT of Egypt, out of our Flesh, and INTO the Spirit.

In being called into Christ we must be called out of our own ways and willingly submit ourselves to HIS Way, Life and Truth and know Him as our Rest and Strength to do and BE all which we cannot and are not: *"Faithful is He Who has called you and will also DO it!"* That word "do" in the Greek means to construct, produce, bear, make - all the things that in religion we are so used to doing OURSELVES in place of Christ (anti-Christ) which is simply idolatry (anything which is instead of Christ). No "thing" must take the place of Christ, even if it bears His Name. We have one Inheritance, one Treasure, one End - Christ. HE is the only One Who can satisfy our Father, it is HIS fruit which He will bear and produce in us and through us and it is HIS temple which He will make and construct and it is His Life and Body which He maintains and sustains. Anything which is not of Him, and from Him, is worthless and that includes things

that WE do for Him. He must be our Source. We must learn to believe Him and trust Him - He IS in control and He DOES know what He is doing with us and why; even if we don't know or understand. Not knowing was all part of the journey for Abraham, but he had firm faith and trust in God regardless.

The Israelites grumbled because of their heart attitude of unbelief and distrust in Who God was, even in spite of all that He had done for them, including the fact that He had called and delivered them from Egypt. In spite of all He had done for them, they still did not KNOW Him. In Hebrews chapters three and four we are very clearly warned to learn from their mistakes so that we don't do the same thing: *"Christ as Son is in charge of the house. Now, if we can only keep a firm grip on this bold confidence, we're the house! That's why the Holy Spirit says, Today, please listen; don't turn a deaf ear as in 'the bitter uprising,' that time of wilderness testing! Even though they watched me at work for forty years, your ancestors refused to let me do it my way; over and over they tried my patience. And I was provoked, oh, so provoked! I said, 'They'll never keep their minds on God; they refuse to walk down my road.' Exasperated, I vowed, 'They'll never get where they're going, never be able to sit down and rest.' So watch your step, friends. Make sure there's no evil unbelief lying around that will trip you up and throw you off course, diverting you from the living God... For who were the people who turned a deaf ear? Weren't they the very ones Moses led out of Egypt? And who was God provoked with for forty years? Wasn't it those who turned a deaf ear and ended up corpses in the wilderness? And when he swore that they'd never get where they were going, wasn't he talking to the ones who turned a deaf ear? They never got there because they never listened, never believed."* (Hebrews 3:6-12, 16-19 The Message). Often our 'trust' in God can sound like it is a last resort, "I'll just have to trust God..." or "I'll just pray..." because we appear to have no other option: "I can't DO anything more so I'm afraid, my only option now is to trust God". That response can be based on Self and fear rather than being the result of trust in our loving Father.

The wilderness is a place where our listening, believing, and trusting is tested. We have to learn to let go of our ways of doing things and stop trusting ourselves, because God's Way is for us to completely give up on Self so that He can establish His trust in us in His Way Who is Christ. We

are called OUT of Self and INTO Christ. What we can find hard is that we CAN'T do this ourselves. I have to give up on myself and just wait and trust God to do this - in HIS time. In Egypt as slaves we were used to doing all the work ourselves; we were slaves of the system, we were organized, WE provided what was needed, we were self-sufficient. And, of course, WE would get the glory and praise for our work. But in the wilderness we learn the exact opposite: we can do nothing; GOD provides, GOD guides, GOD protects, He is in control! It is only when we allow Him to deal with all our trying and doing that He is then able to lead us into His Promised Land of Rest...

### **Called Into the Promised Land**

The Promised Land can only be entered into by going out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the river Jordan. The river Jordan represents death to Self and all of what Egypt stands for: bondage, slavery, work, religion. It was almost entirely a new generation that entered the Promised Land. Why did so many die in the wilderness? Because they could not let go of their old ways of doing things themselves. They could not trust and obey as God desired them to. And things were not immediately all fine and dandy when they entered the Promised Land either. We might think that the Israelites should have just marched right on in and taken the land, since God had said it was theirs, but no. God had them stop and camp out on the enemy's ground (which the enemies KNEW was no longer theirs) and He made His people sore and defenceless by having them all circumcised. Why didn't He require them to do that on the other side of the Jordan in preparation for entering Canaan? Perhaps because He was testing them to see if they were still afraid of the reports of 'giants' in the land and to see whether they were going to listen to what their minds and circumstances were saying: "This is crazy! If we're all sore and recovering from surgery in this new place full of our enemies, then who's going to protect us and our families against them while we recover? We're sitting ducks!". It may have been a test to see if they had learned their lesson and would truly believe and trust God despite their circumstances and in spite of appearances.

Circumcise and circumstance both start the same because "circum" means surrounding or around. Those circumstances which surround us can seem like our enemies - but where is our focus? The circumcision of

our hearts results in our looking at Christ instead of looking all around! God uses our circumstances to cut the flesh away from our hearts. Our hearts reproduce what they are full of and they need the flesh cut away from them just as physical circumcision cuts the flesh off of the reproductive organ.

The Israelites knew that there were enemies in this Promised Land, and we too have enemies in our Promised Land. The biggest giant that needs conquering in the land is Me and my flesh. We can be our own worst enemy, but it is very good to know that God is the Conqueror of that enemy and every other! So often our brains work overtime trying to figure things out; a symptom of the fact that I actually have more belief and trust in myself than in God because I'm not trusting HIM to work things out either with OR without me. That is pride and unbelief and is exactly why the Israelites were unable to enter into the Promised Land. Our loving and amazingly patient and gracious Father calls us to repent of trying to do things ourselves and to leave all that "work" behind us because He has a far better Way for us! When we stop trying in our own strength to please God then Christ and His abundant Strength and Ability and Way take the place of my abundant weakness and inability.

When we DO learn to truly trust, then God is released to work in spectacular ways! Too often our "helping" Him actually hinders and limits Him. The only help He wants from us is the kind that is instigated by Him when He asks us to help Him (instead of the other way around). So often our mentality is the opposite; instead of us working with and helping Him, we expect Him to work with and help us which of course assumes that WE know what is best for us and others; it also means WE want to be in control instead of Him. Trusting Him only seems hard because we are so used to trusting ourselves. In one sense trusting Him is actually the easiest thing to do (we rest, He does it all) the hard work is for us to stop trusting in ourselves. If our Father chooses to hide something or not do something then we know that He has good reasons for doing this and we can trust Him to reveal what we need to know and see at the exact right time. HE is our Provider and Organizer! If we try to figure it all out first, then we can totally mess things up for Him. He loves for us to just trust Him.

Another area of this Egyptian 'working' mentality is thinking that because

I know that I am not worthy of anything He has provided and given, I must therefore help and work to prove to Him that He made a good choice in selecting me. But that is simply pride and my flesh STILL trying to be worthy (an impossibility from the start!) and if I insist on 'helping' and carry on slaving in this Egyptian mode, then I forfeit my entrance into the Promised Land and cannot experience the depths of the amazing Freedom, Peace and Rest which cost Jesus so much to freely give us... Instead I must go around the mountain yet again. When we are firmly established in Him then trusting Him is the first and only option and fear cannot get a foothold. THAT is certainly Rest AND Victory; for both Him and us!

### **Called Into Christ**

*"The land which you go in to possess is not like the land of Egypt, from which you came out, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your foot laboriously as in a garden of vegetables..."* I was intrigued by this 'watered it with your foot' statement and I wondered if it meant that they dug irrigation ditches with their feet, but I discovered that in Egypt the fields were irrigated by the Israelite slaves pumping water from the river. There was not enough rain in Egypt and 'watered it with your foot' refers to the large pumping wheels which were worked by foot to draw water from the Nile for the gardens.

Clearly this is symbolic of working in our own strength to get water from the earth (which will always be polluted water!) instead of simply knowing and trusting God as the Source and Supply of His pure Water freely falling from Above. It is totally about control. The big difference between 'watering with your foot' and the rain, is control - the illusion of man being in control versus the reality of God being in control. In Egypt the slaves controlled when and how the crops were watered by their hard work. But in the Promised Land it is not up to man and his work, but totally up to God - a very BIG difference! He is in control and we simply trust and wait to receive the Rain in HIS time and season.

I'm not endorsing laziness at all, but I'm seeing that so much of who we are and what we do and say is so often based on the curse of the garden of Eden: ploughing the dirt, sowing the seed, weeding, watering, harvesting etc. It is based on OUR sweat and tears instead of simply

trusting and resting on God's abundant blessing and provision. We can be so bound by the mindsets and habits of being slaves working in Egypt that it can even make us feel guilty if we appreciate and freely partake of the fruit of the Promised Land when we haven't personally helped to produce it. And yet THAT is the whole message of the Good News - nothing WE can do can ever make us worthy or fit for God, only what HE has already done and provided in Christ satisfies God: *"The land which you go in to possess is NOT LIKE the land of Egypt, from which you came out..."* The Promised Land is just a totally different place to anything we've known before; all the previous ways of knowing and doing things no longer apply, now we have only one Source and Goal - THE Land Himself!

Even though God called me out of Egypt years ago, He has still much work to do in getting Egypt and its bondage and religious ways out of me and the best place to do that is in the wilderness - going in circles around the mountain and dealing with unbelief and learning to let go of my ways and REALLY trust, rest and believe in God as my sole Provider and Controller of all. Of course we still see and know His blessing in the wilderness, He provides the manna, meat, water, guidance and protection, but all that is like nothing compared to what He has planned for us in His Promised Land which is a Place of Rest and Peace where we freely live in Him, for Him and from Him without needing to labour to bring His Life forth - it is now ALL God's work - He provides the Rain and waters His Field!

### **Christ Reigning**

In our "civilised" countries we tend to forget the importance of the rain; we know that every time we turn on the tap or faucet, drinkable water will flow. WE are in control of it! I grew up in Borneo where we had no water system and rain water was very precious to us, particularly in the dry season. The river water was always there but it was terribly polluted and had to be boiled before it was safe to drink, and even then it had a taste to it and wasn't clear. But the rain water we could drink immediately. During the dry season, whenever it did rain, we'd drop everything and run outside to put out buckets etc... anything to catch the precious water.

Rain is symbolic of the words and presence of God in the Bible (*Is. 55:10,11, Deut. 32:2, Ps. 68:8,9*). In nature rain is one way in which God produces and sustains life, and Christ reigning in our life produces and sustains true Life. Where there is no water, man intervenes. One way depends on man's invention, the other depends totally on God. One way trusts in man, the other in God. One way receives through man, the other through God.

The first definition of the Greek word translated in the Bible as "evil" is: 'full of labour and toil'. The amazing thing about knowing Christ as our Rest from labour and toil is that there is NOTHING we can do make this Rest happen - it has to be God that does it, it is all Grace! It is a fact that we cannot know rest when we are troubled, anxious and trying to work things out ourselves; may God deliver us from this evil!

So, the wilderness is a very important place. In the wilderness there is no longer the machinery of Egypt or men's inventions for us to use and rely on, there are no longer slave-drivers telling us what to do and giving us our portion of food, and we no longer have even a house to call our own. Everything in the wilderness is ordered and controlled by our loving Father for our own good. The whole purpose of the wilderness is for God to train, test and prove us. Many of our experiences in the wilderness are not positive ones, but negative. God uses both the positive and the negative things in our lives in order to bring much-needed balance. This is the necessary and loving training of our Father: *"You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and allowed you to hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you recognize and personally know that man does not live by bread only, but man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord... Know also in your hearts that, as a man disciplines and instructs his son, so the Lord your God disciplines and instructs you."* (Deut. 8:2,3,5).

Forty years is a long time. Lessons to be learned in the wilderness are not only trust and obedience, but also patience and waiting for God's time. Most of us don't like waiting because it seems like a waste of time to us! And it IS a waste of time so long as we view the time as OURS!



When we see that we own nothing and that all we are and have is God's, including time, then we wait in Rest with patience and expectation, because this is HIS work, being done in His time, and in His way.

In Egypt our identity was linked to what we did or where we went and this defined us. In the wilderness we are stripped of all that so that we let it all go and stop trusting ourselves and begin trusting God. In the Promised Land we find our identity is hidden in Christ and we rest in His finished work. This whole issue is a big one and a mindset which needs to be broken in us so that we can enter into the Promised Land and Rest.

May we receive and appropriate the Grace to give up all our own striving and straining so that we may know and experience Christ as our Inheritance and Promised Land of Abundance and Rest, and that He may receive us as His Inheritance, even as He is ours!

**"Faithful is He Who is calling you and utterly trustworthy, and He will also do it." (1 Thess. 5:24).**



# Being Holy

**As the One Who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all your conduct and manner of living. For it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy. And if you call upon Him as [your] Father Who judges each one impartially according to what he does, [then] conduct yourselves with true reverence throughout the time of your temporary residence [on the earth]. 1 Peter 1:15-17.**

In observing some of what is being believed and said these days, we have become increasingly concerned about much of what is being accepted as gospel truth. The message being promoted sounds like: "God loves you, so just go ahead and do whatever you think is right, He'll love you regardless so do what you want to; you have the freedom to do what you want because Christ has freed you from all accountability and responsibility and anyone who says otherwise is trying to put you back under the law".

Obviously there is truth in that: God loves us and we have been freed from the law of sin and death. However, the other side of that is truth which brings much needed balance: our Father is *Holy*, and while we know Him intimately (as He desires us to), yet we are also in awe and reverence of Him. We are His children AND His servants (both) and as such we are responsible and accountable to Him for what we say and do (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 14:12; 1 Pet. 4:4,5). When one truth is focused on to the exclusion of other balancing truths, the result is a mixture of truth and error.

One consequence of having our eyes opened to see the errors which churches teach is to then question everything. We unlearn many things, learning the Truth, Life and Way of Christ instead. While that is all good, we need to be careful that in having our mindsets challenged we don't go to the extreme of rejecting what *is* from God. Discerning Christ and His Body are vital. We certainly need to challenge our thinking and beliefs but not according to what man says or even by what we think makes sense, but by testing our beliefs with the Scriptures and their Author. You will see that I have included a number of verses and references in this article

in the hopes that you will test for yourself what I have written, like the Jews in Berea who were praised for searching and examining the Scriptures daily to see if what was being said was true (Acts 17:11).

### **Knowing the Word of God**

The Bible does not seem to be as popular as other books to read or quote from these days and while I understand and appreciate that Christ is the Word of God, the Bible itself is the only objective 'authority' we have. Jesus Himself referred to the Scriptures and quoted them often; if He who was the Word Himself saw the need to do that, how much more ought we to do the same?!

If we base everything on our personal, subjective spiritual experiences or on what others say without balancing that with what is written in the Bible, we can easily get things twisted... to our own selfish advantage. The opposite is also true; if we base everything solely on the Bible and don't balance that with what Christ is saying now to us personally, we can interpret the Scriptures to further our own agenda. This is what the church historically has done, so let's learn from that and not do the very same thing by going to the other extreme! We need to know what the Bible says and just one quick reading of the book written to the Hebrews would reveal how far from the original message many have gone... both in and outside of the church.

Obviously there is debate about the Bible and what is of man, what is of God etc; there are paradoxes and seeming contradictions. If we try to understand it all, the Bible may become a stumbling block. Yet just because we can't understand something doesn't mean it is not true! It is only as we surrender our Self and accept the fact that even when we are at our wisest we still know nothing, that Revelation may come. We cannot see or know anything of eternal, spiritual significance unless the Spirit of God reveals it to us. If we could understand the entire Bible with our intellect, then we would not need Him and we would be proud of what we knew. Instead, we know that we truly know nothing... we cannot comprehend *anything* of God except by His Holy Spirit; it is entirely His doing and we are dependent upon Him.

Jesus Himself used the Scriptures to support what He was saying over

and over; He also used them to refute what the enemy was saying and He knew when Scriptures were being used to further the enemy's agenda (Luke 4:3-12). For "every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration) and profitable for instruction, for reproof and conviction of sin, for correction of error and discipline in obedience, for training in righteousness (in holy living, in conformity to God's will in thought, purpose, and action), so that the man of God may be complete and proficient, well fitted and thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

Of course if you no longer accept that the Bible is important or necessary, then everything is judged by what YOU believe to be right and you set yourself up as judge and king in place of God (Judges 21:25). The ultimate end of questioning and removing all authority, of both the Bible and of God, is that you have no king. Instead Self is on the throne and governs and of course this feels good and oh so "right" to us! Many so-called spiritual things are nothing more than earthly, fleshly substitutes which feel good to us. It is easy to think that our own voice is the voice of God... our hearts are naturally selfish and incredibly deceitful and our religious, self-righteous flesh is especially devious. While we are a new creation in our spirit (born again) we still have the old creation to deal with in our body, mind and soul and therein lies the battle for Life!

We need to have our minds renewed (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23), otherwise we are likely to not only say things with an agenda, but to also read things with an agenda: seeing and hearing only what we already think something says. Only One can unveil to us what is in our mind and heart for "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly perverse and corrupt and severely, mortally sick! Who can know it [perceive, understand, be acquainted with his own heart and mind]? I the Lord search the mind, I try the heart, even to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." (Jer. 17:9-10). The *Holy* Spirit reveals what is unholy and what we need to see about ourselves.

### **To be Called Out is to be Separated**

This is a big part of what being Called-out ones is about. When you are called out of something, you are *separated* from it: out, set apart, different. Leaving church for me was, and still is, about being purified;

purified from Self, religion and idolatry: "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty". I do not want you to fellowship and be partners with diabolical spirits... Shall we thus provoke the Lord to jealousy and anger and indignation? Are we stronger than He [that we should defy Him]?" (2 Cor. 6:16,17; 1 Cor. 10:20,21). Paul told the Romans to offer themselves as a living sacrifice, *HOLY*... and acceptable to God, yet today many seem to be either forgetting or ignorant of the fact that God said "be holy as I am holy". His main characteristic is *holiness*. Love is but one expression of that holiness. But other, not so "nice" or "positive" but equally valid elements of God's holiness include jealousy (Ex. 20:5; Deut. 4:24; 2 Cor. 11:2), hate (Is. 61:8; Amos 5:21; Rev. 2:6) and anger (Ex. 4:14; Deut. 6:15; Mark 3:5); all come from His holiness.

In Hebrew the word 'holiness' means being set apart and separated from all that is unholy. God and His Love are holy, sacred and pure. Love separates by bringing a separation in the heart from all substitutes and from all that seeks to distract from the Loved One. This Love is exclusive; not physically, but in the *heart* for Love is a heart issue. Sometimes people mistakenly think holiness means separating themselves physically from those considered "unholy" for fear of contamination. That stinks of death and religion and I am not meaning that at all!

Some of the harshest things Jesus said were to those who considered themselves separated and holy but who were hypocrites, eg Matthew 23. Jesus had no qualms about being friends with those considered some of the worst of sinners, He welcomed them and His holiness was not in any way threatened by their unholiness because holiness is not about where we are physically, but where we are spiritually! Holiness occurs in our lives as a *result* of living in the Holy One. We *are* the temple of the Holy Spirit and outward things cannot change who we are. Doing supposedly right or holy things will never make you a holy person. There is only One Who is truly Holy and His Life being lived in you and through you, purifies and makes you holy.

Love frees us to become a slave, for there is nothing more enslaving than Love. Whereas Love delightfully binds you eternally to this One to the exclusion of all others, these days it seems as though people believe God's Love is all-inclusive - including anything and everything. But there is an element to Love which is very exclusive; there is a singleness, an obsession, a simplicity and purity about a heart in Love. The Loved One is the Person seen, appreciated, listened to and desired above all.

One thing I hear frequently is that God is a God of Love and not of judgment. The phrase "God is Love" occurs only twice in the Bible, and while it is beyond dispute that God is loving, my question is: Why does He have to be either Love or Judgment; can He not be BOTH? It seems very clear to me that He is both, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him... For the time [has arrived] for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will [be] the end of those who do not respect or believe or obey the good news of God? ...You make God tired with all your talk. 'How do we tire him out?' you ask. By saying, 'God loves sinners and sin alike. God loves all.' And also by saying, 'Judgment? God's too nice to judge.'" (1 Jn. 4:16,17; 1 Pet. 4:17; Mal. 2:17).

Love IS Judgment and Judgment IS Love. One does not exclude the other. *Love judges against whatever will endanger the Beloved and also corrects*: "Those whom I love, I tell their faults and *convict* and convince and reprove and chasten." (Rev. 3:19a). Yes God is Love and Grace, but He is also *Holy and a Consuming Fire*: "Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28,29) and that is not the Old Testament, but the New. Let's not treat the Old Testament with disdain as though it were second-rate and we don't need it, for those Scriptures were what Jesus and His first followers read and quoted from and they did not need to be taught about the holiness of God because they already *knew* He was holy!

### **Holiness Personified**

The word "holy" is used in the Bible over 500 times. God is referred to

over and over as "the Holy One" and Jesus is called "the Holy One of God" and the Spirit is "the Holy Spirit of God". We are in danger of making God in our own image if we accept only those aspects we like and can identify with. He is GOD!!! We cannot understand everything about Him! Rather than attempting to bring God down to our level and trying to explain Him so that we can all understand Him better and identify with Him more intimately, we instead need to be *raised up* to His level in the Man whom He has *already* sent and be seated with Him in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6).

We all have a desire to be accepted and loved for who we are (and in spite of who we are!) and while our Father loves us for who we are, we seem to find it hard to accept and love Him for Who He reveals Himself to be in the Bible. If we reject aspects of Who our Father is because we don't like or understand them, and if we don't know Him as the Holy One, then I wonder do we *really* know Him? We may know some things about Him, but not really know Him because He IS Holy—that is Who He is. Sometimes I think we forget that this is GOD we are dealing with! The answer to Who are You? Is: "I AM Holy"; not I am Love, or Joy or Peace. In the Revelation of Jesus Christ the living creatures are not around the throne crying "Love, Love, Love!" or "Joy, Joy, Joy!" They are crying: "Holy, Holy, HOLY, is the Lord God Almighty, Who was, and Who is, and Who is to come!" and those around the throne *fall down and worship* and say, "Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and dominion, for You created all things; by Your will they were created." (Rev. 4:8-11). True worship is a result of truly seeing and knowing our holy God.

Paul said: "Make sure you stay alert to these qualities of gentle kindness *and* ruthless severity that exist side by side in God—ruthless with the deadwood, gentle with the grafted shoot. But don't presume on this gentleness. The moment you become deadwood, you're out of there." (Romans 11:22). This "dead wood" is in reference to the Olive Tree and some branches being grafted onto the natural branches. The dead wood is that which no longer has the sap of Life running through it. It is cut off, pruned and separated from the Tree; it needs to be cut off for the health of the rest of the Tree. Life characterizes everything which is of God. Jesus said: "Any branch in Me that does not bear fruit He cuts away (trims off, takes away)" (John 15:2).



There are plenty of these so-called negative statements in the New Testament, Paul said to Timothy: "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self... *unholy*... conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power... always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth... Herald and preach the Word! Keep your sense of urgency, whether the opportunity seems to be favorable or unfavorable... For the time is coming when [people] will not tolerate sound and wholesome instruction [doctrine], but, having ears itching [for something pleasing and gratifying], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold, and will turn aside from hearing the truth and wander off into myths and man-made fictions." (from 2 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:2,3).

We are in danger of wandering off into man-made fictions when we either don't know or don't accept what God has already provided: the Word of God (both the living: Christ, and the written: Bible). The two go together yet historically many have accepted only the written. We must be transformed rather than simply "informed" (Rom 12:2). Information and even reformation can never rival transformation. Information about Christ does not equal knowing Him.

His Grace, Mercy and Love *must* bring balance, for many have been in churches where they learned to be literally afraid of God and what He could do to them, but going to the opposite extreme and ignoring the Otherness of God does not balance things, instead it tips the scales too far the other way resulting in becoming so familiar with God that we lose the sense of His holiness and sanctity. It is only when we have seen something of the holiness of God and how beyond comprehension He is, that we begin to truly, deeply appreciate the immensity of His Mercy and Grace. Otherwise His Grace, Mercy and Love can be quite cheap to us; we may even be arrogant enough to think we deserve them! His Holiness accentuates the wonder and preciousness of His Love, Grace and Mercy.

Seeing something of His holiness establishes awe, reverence and humility in us. It brings a much-needed adjustment to our Self-centred existence. Too often, instead of allowing Truth to bring Light and reveal what is Self in us, the temptation is to hide behind selected verses like

"there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus" and "nothing can separate us from the love of God". Instead of going to the Scriptures and trusting the Sun/Son to be our Light and reveal all, many use a man-made flashlight to highlight just small portions they like while Self remains hidden in the darkness (John 3:19,20). The incredible freedom that Christ paid such an enormous price for, was not to free us to use love and grace as a license or a reason to do whatever we want to do! That is *not* freedom but bondage: bondage to Self. Christ came to set us free from the tyranny of His enemies, including Sin AND from Self!

The only way to be free of Self is through the Cross of Christ, through death. While we are dead to Sin through Christ's death, we need to daily die to Self and to the old way of us being in control and being king. God's ways so often make no sense to us, when Jesus told His friends that He was going to be killed, "Peter took Jesus aside and told him to stop talking like that. He said, "God would never let this happen to You, Lord!" Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Satan (enemy), get away from Me! You're in My way because *you think like everyone else and not like God.*" Then Jesus said to His disciples: If any of you want to be My followers, you must forget about yourself, deny yourself. You must take up your cross and follow Me. *If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*" (Matt 16:22-24; Luke 9:23).

The Cross was typified in the Old Testament by sacrifices burned on the altar—the key word being *sacrifice*. We don't naturally like sacrifice, or being denied, or forgetting about Self. But truly, this Way of God is the Way of Truth and Life as we yield, surrender and sacrifice what is most precious to us: our very Self. This Way is costly but in losing yourself, you find Life and Treasure in Christ for it is only as we lose all that we find All in He who is our Holiness!

**Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unfathomable are His judgments! And how untraceable (mysterious, undiscoverable) are His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord and who has understood His thoughts, or who has been His counselor? Or who has first given God anything that he might be paid back or that he could claim a recompense? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever!**

**Amen (so be it). I appeal to you therefore and beg of you in view of the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service and spiritual worship. Romans 11:33-12:1**



# Being Trumpets

**"All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains - look! When a trumpet is blown - hear!" Isaiah 18:3.**

Right throughout the Bible trumpets are instruments which are frequently mentioned. Obviously trumpets cannot make any sound without the Breath blowing through them and the Greek word translated as both Spirit and wind in the Bible is "Pneuma": a movement of air (a gentle blast) of the wind, hence the wind itself, or breath of nostrils or mouth. Similarly, the Hebrew word for Spirit is Ruwach and is defined as wind, breath, mind, spirit and this word is again used interchangeably for breath, wind and spirit.

The definition of the Spirit of God as Breath is full of meaning not only when thinking of the Breath/Spirit blowing through us as His trumpets/instruments but also because Breath indicates Life. In New Zealand the Maori (the indigenous people of the country) greet each other with what is called a hongi: two people press noses together and the hongi is usually longer with someone you know well. This greeting is a symbol of trust and unity in acknowledging that we all are from the one breath of life - it is a sharing of breath and life. The Breath of God is what brings Life, from beginning to end! Breathing is a silent, largely unseen process which is absolutely essential to Life and is necessary to all instruments of God. We must first inhale before we can exhale - we must be breathing the Breath of God as our Life before we can be an instrument which He can blow through.

There are two different types of trumpets mentioned in the Old Testament, predominantly the shofar (a ram's horn) and less frequently, the silver trumpets. God instructed Moses to have two silver trumpets made as part of His instructions regarding the tabernacle (Numbers 10:1-10). The priests, who were the sons of Aaron (whose name means "Light Bringer"), were to use the silver trumpets for calling people together and for alerting them when it was time to break up camp and move on. The trumpets were also to be blown as an alarm of danger and when going to

war, and were used in praise and as part of the feasts and ceremonies of the temple.

The shofar was a common every day instrument and was used not only by the priests, but by any man, from shepherds through to watchmen. The shofar was made from a ram's horn - a beast of the earth. The silver trumpets, on the other hand, had to be specially made according to the specific design and instructions from God - from one piece of beaten, hammered silver. They were to be used only on specific occasions and only by the priests, under the control and instruction of the Breath. There were two of them made from the same material, indicating their corporate unity, harmony and koinonia (joint participation and partnership). The two silver trumpets are always translated as plural right through the Old Testament with the exception of only one verse, Hosea 5:8. They were made to work together and sound the same.

### **Made of Pure Silver**

Silver, gold and precious jewels are often used in the Bible to symbolize aspects of God and His nature in His people - so what are the properties of silver? It is light sensitive which is why it is used in photography, and it is the best reflector known to man which is why it is used in mirrors. Pure silver is malleable and ductile and is the best conductor of heat and electricity out of all other metals and it does not corrode. Like gold, it is rare (only five parts in a million) and expensive and must be refined and purified by fire in order to get rid of all impurities before it can be used and formed into an instrument. Silver can endure extreme temperature ranges. Silver ore is first crushed and ground then goes through processes of having water, lime and acid added before getting to the refining fire. In the case of the silver trumpets, they were made from one piece of silver, so they had gone through this difficult process of refining and formation together.

Silver must be kept clean and polished so as not to get tarnished. We can get tarnished, like silver, by the pollution of this world's atmosphere around us - tarnishing is a fact of living in this world. Like trumpets, we also must be kept free of blockages, which may be things about ourselves which hinder or stop God's Spirit in and through us. As we yield to the work of the Spirit of God in our lives, He clears, cleanses and

polishes us; restoring and keeping us in optimal condition ready for Him to blow through. The trumpets were merely a means or an instrument for conveying the sound caused by the Breath. The instruments, while necessary, are NOTHING without the Trumpeter! Without the Breath/Spirit, trumpets are silent and can make no noise...

These silver trumpets were not used all that often. To many that might appear to be a waste to have such expensive instruments and yet use them only occasionally. But God is more interested in quality than quantity and in what we are made of than what we do.

*"In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honour and some unto dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour. 2 Timothy 2:20.* What distinguishes between these vessels? We note at once that only their materials are specified, not their function. Clearly, in keeping with the greatness of the house, it is not relative usefulness but quality of materials that counts. Gold and silver vessels are less practically useful than wooden furniture or earthenware pots, but God is not discussing with us what they will be used for; He is judging their value to Himself. In a day of declension God looks beyond mere usefulness to intrinsic worth, and a few ounces of gold may equal in value a whole hall full of wooden benches! In spiritual terms, two different men may utter almost identical words, but the power lies not merely in what they say but in who they are. Balaam and Isaiah both spoke of the Kingdom of Christ..." (from *"A Table in the Wilderness"* by Watchman Nee).

Silver represents righteous and true words in the Bible: *"The tongues of those who are upright and in right standing with God are as choice silver"* (Proverbs 10:20a), *"A word fitly spoken and in due season is like apples of gold in settings of silver"* (Proverbs 25:11). The standard currency of the day was shekels of silver which were used for trade. In the same way, words are also traded; they are given and received (often with the expectation of something in return), and some words have more value and worth than others - based upon their weight and clarity. God's voice is likened to a trumpet in the Bible (Ex. 19:19; Rev. 1:10; 4:1) and the words spoken from God's mouth are like pure silver: *"The words and*

*promises of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in an earthen furnace, purified seven times over."* (Psalm 12:6). It seems clear that the silver trumpets are symbolic of God's Word and Message going forth in clarity and purity.

When playing a trumpet the sound is made through three things: the breath, the tongue and the lips - ALL of which are also necessary for speaking! God is still using silver trumpets today through whom He blows His Breath/Spirit. Yet the sound which comes forth must be distinct and clear - if the trumpets give an indistinct sound, who will prepare themselves? (1 Cor. 14:8). And if someone tries to trumpet forth a message without having been first made into an instrument which has been refined, hammered, prepared and created by God, they will be like wind that just blows away: "the prophets will become wind, and the word is not IN them" (Jer. 5:13). We need to be first formed into His instruments through the refining and purifying of the fire of God (Mal 3:1-3) and this is something which changes our constitution and who we are forever.

### **The Sound of the Trumpets**

Trumpets have a very clear and pure sound which seems somehow to be clearer and louder than any other musical instrument. However, not everybody likes trumpets because they can offend; they are usually quite a loud and even frightening instrument. The silver trumpets were used to alert the people to danger and battles. They were also sounded to let the Israelites know when it was time to journey on and follow the cloud, and sometimes that occurred during the night so they would have been woken up by the sound of the silver trumpets (Num 9:21). But being woken up by trumpets can be a bit of a shock! Yet how necessary it is for us today to hear and know God's voice as a trumpet blast which wakes us from our spiritual apathy, sleep and even death...

A loud trumpet blast is needed to break through our spiritual death/sleep/lifelessness and raise us to Life in Christ! *"Take notice! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all fall asleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet call. For a trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable MUST put on the imperishable*

(Christ) *and this mortal MUST put on immortality (Life!)*" (1 Cor 15:51-53). Resurrection isn't just a thing we receive in the future but is a Person we can know now; Jesus said "I AM the Resurrection and the Life; whoever believes and trusts in Me, though he is dead yet shall he live. I came that they may have and enjoy Life and have it in abundance, to the full, till it overflows" (John 11:25; 10:25b). Most of us know that truth and agree in our head that Jesus is Resurrection and Life, but the question is: do I know Him as MY Life? Have I experienced Him as Resurrection? We need to know and see the truth and reality of Christ as Resurrection and Life in our own personal experience. This Resurrection Life is not just something that may take place in the future but is Someone which we need to be seeing and knowing now, *"that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed in spirit into His likeness even to His death, in the hope that if possible I may attain to the spiritual and moral resurrection that lifts me out from among the dead even while in the body."* (Phil. 3:10b-11).

One message which God is sounding through His instruments is found in Revelation 4:1,2: *"...I looked and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice which I had heard addressing me like a trumpet said, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place in the future"* and the result of individuals who truly hear His trumpet call is: *"at once I came under the Spirit's power and BEHOLD, a throne stood in heaven, with One seated on the throne!"* - the effect of hearing the Voice of the Breath of God is that people come under the Spirit's power and have the revelation of seeing the One seated on the throne! "Come up here, and I will show you..." but not everybody wants to be woken up let alone get up and go up...

"Come up here..." but going up can seem like hard work and is impossible if we rely on ourselves and our own strength, abilities, righteousness and life; it can only happen as the Wind blows away what is dead and gives us His new Life, Breath, Strength and Vision: "I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, (I STOP!) and watch to see what He will say to me, (I LOOK!) and what I will answer when I am corrected. Then the Lord answered me and said: (I LISTEN!) Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run (get hot!) who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will SPEAK, and it will not lie (or deceive). Though it tarries, wait for it; (stop, look and



listen!) because it will surely come, it will not tarry (be delayed or deferred)." (Habakkuk 2:1-3 NKJV). The word 'SPEAK' in that verse is the Hebrew word "puwach" which is similar to ruwach and means: to cause to breathe out, blow, puff, exhale, utter.

The sons of the Light Bringer today are being used to trumpet: *"AWAKE, O sleeper and arise from the dead and Christ shall shine and make day dawn upon you and give you light."* (Eph 5:14). To those who are of this world, physical bodily resurrection is a really big thing; we think it is a great sign and wonder if someone comes back to life! But how much *more* of a miracle is spiritual resurrection from spiritual death! Those who are born from above are desiring, praying and looking for the UNSEEN and eternal coming to Life - looking for the unseen resurrection of Christ's Life in people who were dead even while they lived... This miracle of His Resurrection Life in us is truly a great sign and a wonder but one which may be unseen and unrecognised and unheralded by most people. May He give us eyes to truly see the reality of His Life and to see and know Him as Victory and Resurrection in our own experience: *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? But THANKS be to God Who gives us the Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Since we consider and look NOT to the things that are seen but to the things that are UNseen; for the things that are visible are temporal, brief and fleeting, but the things that are invisible are DEATHLESS and everlasting!"* (1 Cor 15:55,57; 2 Cor 4:18).

Resurrection Life is the ultimate in freedom! Death is the greatest enemy to life so to be freed from death and instead to know and experience Life and be raised with Christ to be seated with Him in the heavenlies is Life and Triumph and Victory indeed! Nothing can get in the way of Resurrection Life; Christ has done it all and IS All. Ezekiel was told to prophesy to the valley of dry bones: *"...Behold I will cause breath and spirit to enter you, and you shall live... and I will put breath and spirit in you, and you shall live; and you shall know, understand and realize that I Am the Lord."* (Ezekiel 37:5,6). How we need this resurrection Life every day! We may look alive and yet still not have the Breath or Spirit of God as our Life - we may still be dry bones.

Being brought from a state of death to Life is something which only Christ and the power of His Life can do; death is final and means there is no

hope naturally. I used to think I was an alive Christian and full of the Spirit of God and I did all the things that "good Christians" are supposed to do, but it wasn't until the Holy Spirit blew upon me and raised me to Life in Him that I came to really know through experience what real Life is and there is no comparison between religion and Life; they are as different as night and day! I used to appreciate and read the Bible, but compared to Christ the Living Word reading it with me and being in me, my previous reading of it was dead. I realized I had been like the bodies Ezekiel saw; looking like I was alive, but desperately needing the Breath of God to breathe on me (Ezek. 37:8-10).

When you are asleep or dead, *you do not know your need!* You have no idea that you are essentially blind, deaf and dumb. It is only when you are awake and alive that you can at last really see, hear, feel, touch and speak because you have Life.

What is vital and eternal is the *unseen spiritual life* rather than anything visible and external. "*Woe to him who says to the wooden image, Awake! and to the dumb stone, Arise, teach! Yet it cannot for behold, it is laid over with gold and silver and there is no breath at all inside it!*" (Hab. 2:19). We are simply dumb stones and dry bones until and unless the Breath of God blows and awakens us, breathing His Life into us and transforming us into His living stones. What we may appear to be on the outside is unimportant and can be deceptive; we may look as though we are covered in the gold and silver of God's nature and words, but what matters is the internal, unseen heart of who we truly are before God - are we simply gold and silver plated or are we genuine, true and solid to the core? Our Father is looking for only one thing: His Son and His Truth - His Life in us and through us.

May we be those who know Christ as our Life and allow Him to refine, purify, and form us into silver trumpets which reflect His glory and Light and through whom He can blow and sound His message of Life with clarity and purity, waking many and raising them from death to abundant Life in Him!

**"The Spirit and the Bride (the Breath and the Trumpets) say, COME!  
And let him who is listening say, COME! And let everyone who is  
thirsty, (who is painfully conscious of his need of being refreshed,**

**supported and strengthened); and whoever desires to do it, let him  
COME, take, appropriate and drink the Water of LIFE without cost!"**

*Revelation 22:17*

# Being Strong and Free

**Wake up, wake up, O Zion! Clothe yourself with strength... Sit in a place of honor. Remove the chains of slavery from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion. (Isaiah 52:1,2 NLT)**

I recently looked at the Hebrew word translated as "virtuous" in Proverbs 31: "Who can find a *virtuous* woman? For her price is far above rubies". This began an interesting journey of discovery!

To begin with, many misunderstand what the term "virtuous" in this verse means. In Christian circles it is generally believed to refer to this woman being very good, righteous, subordinate, submissive and gentle; an example of moral excellence. "Virtuous" in English means to conform to moral and ethical principles; to be morally excellent, upright and chaste. However, this is not what the word in the original Hebrew means. It means almost the exact opposite of a submissive, gentle woman, and instead speaks of one who is strong, forceful, powerful and warlike. The Jews are more correct in their translation by calling her a woman of valour instead of a woman of virtue.

The definition of the Hebrew word is: strength, power, might (especially warlike), ability, efficiency, wealth, force, army. This means that this woman mentioned in Proverbs is a force to be reckoned with! The word is most often translated as "army" and of the 243 occurrences of the word in the Bible, there are only four times that it is translated as "virtuous" and, oddly enough, *all four refer to women* (Ruth 3:11; Prov. 12:4; Prov. 31:10,29). Wycliffe translated this Hebrew word as "strong": "Who shall find a strong woman?" But the translators for King James changed the word to "virtuous" and it has remained as "virtuous" in most translations of the Bible since.

## The Translator's Agenda

Was there perhaps an agenda behind translating this word as "virtuous" instead of "strong" or "powerful"? It certainly wouldn't be the first time that translators of the Bible changed what the original text said to suit

themselves and their own agenda. Remember that all of the translators of the KJV English Bible were male. "Supposing women only had translated the Bible, from age to age, is there a likelihood that men would have rested content with the outcome? Therefore, our brothers have no good reason to complain if, while conceding that men have done the best they could alone, we assert that they did not do the best that could have been done. The work would have been of a much higher order had they first helped women to learn the sacred languages (instead of putting obstacles in their way), and then, have given them a place by their side on translations committees." (Katherine Bushnell - "God's Word to Women").

When we look at the era that these men lived in, we see how suppressed and oppressed women were. They were not treated as equals of men, instead they were seen as the property of men and were considered inferior to them: "For centuries girls had been told and, if educated, [taught] that they were inferior. So by the time they became women, they would have acted as if they were inferior to men. The Church taught this and used the Bible to justify this belief. If men of God said that women were inferior it had to be true.... So two sections of society grew up to believe the same thing. Both men and women believed that women were inferior to men and that this was ordered by God. No change came with the Reformation. The protestant leader John Knox wrote: 'Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man.'" ([http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/women\\_in\\_tudor\\_england.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/women_in_tudor_england.htm)).

So to have the Bible say that a woman who is strong, forceful and powerful is of great value, went against what the translators and King James believed and taught in their religion and in their culture. To the translators of the day, a chaste, virtuous woman was acceptable whereas a strong one was not; so "virtuous" is what they "translated" the word to mean.

From the fourteenth century on, when the word "virtuous" was used of a woman, it meant chastity. So there would have been no mistaking what was meant in the English Bible, but that is NOT what the original Scriptures said. Some scholars have said that the word in Hebrew means "valiant", "forceful" and "mighty" due to the way the word is used in the Jewish Scriptures. It is almost exclusively used to refer to warfare.

Just to be clear, the strength, wisdom and power that I am talking about are not the natural variety. I'm NOT talking about a woman who is domineering and overbearing. And I'm not talking about a woman who has a strong personality and exerts power over others. There are many "strong" characters, both men and women, who use their "strength of character" for their own benefit and that is NOT a good thing. That kind of strength needs to be broken because it is the strength of a person's own Self, and not the strength of the Spirit of Christ. I am talking about *spiritual* characteristics: the spiritual strength, spiritual wisdom, spiritual authority, and spiritual power that come from only one Source... Christ's Life in us.

We can be very weak in ourselves, and yet be very strong in Christ. God's way is to be our Strength in spite of our weakness, and our Wisdom in spite of our foolishness (1 Cor. 1:25; 2 Cor. 12:9,10). If we do not appreciate, accept, or respect this Strength, Wisdom, Authority and Power in another, *regardless of gender*, then we are disrespecting and even rejecting Christ and His Strength, Wisdom, Authority and Power. So this is an important issue to resolve.

Many still believe (whether consciously or subconsciously) that women are inferior to men, thus keeping both women and men in bondage, all the while believing this to be Biblical when it is not. This belief is very deeply rooted in our culture. I venture to suggest that there is not one woman (especially within religious circles) who at some point in her life has not experienced discrimination and prejudice because of her gender. It is little wonder that many women develop either an inferiority complex or become defiant. This prejudice is something that many of us deal with every day. Men do not experience this discrimination in the way women do; for women it is commonplace.

Paul clearly told the Galatians, "In Him (Christ) the distinctions between Jew and Gentile, slave and free man, male and female, *disappear*; you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28). It can't be put much clearer than that! "Christ in resurrection is the firstborn of a new humanity in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, etc... In the realm of Christ; in the realm of the Holy Spirit; in the realm of the One Body and the One Life they have no standing. They are great realities in

the natural realm and may constitute difficulties, but the Spirit of Christ forbids that they govern attitudes and prejudices... Jews and Gentiles, and all others [including male and female], as such, cease to be. They have disappeared when the Body of Christ comes into view - 'there can be *neither*'; not 'there are *both*'." (T. Austin-Sparks, [The Stewardship of the Mystery - Chapter 3](#)).

That was a radical thing for Paul to say, and obviously he was not talking about physical distinctions and differences! Even aside from what the Bible says, it only takes a little common-sense to realise that we are co-dependent: men cannot do without women, and women cannot do without men. Maybe it is about time we acknowledged and appreciated that!

Any man who truly loves a woman wants to see her reach her full potential and doesn't want to inhibit or suppress her in any way. But unfortunately, along with some of the equalities that women have gained in our society, has come a tendency to put men down and not appreciate men's strengths and differences. This simply will not do. We are *equal* in the sight of God, and it would be good if we were equal in the sight of one another also! That really should go without saying.

Some women are weak, but so are some men. Some women are very sensitive, emotional and irrational, but so are some men. Some women are naive and easily deceived, but so are some men. And some women are not very smart, but some men aren't either. Your gender does not ensure that you will automatically be strong, smart, and sensible or prevent you from being so. Nor does it mean you are more or less valuable as a human!

There is nothing wrong with being a strong woman; in fact the Bible encourages it. "Weak" does not equate to femininity, nor does "strong" equate to masculinity. And when a woman is spiritually strong, it does not necessarily mean she is influenced by a rebellious "Jezebel spirit" any more than a strong man might be! If a man feels intimidated by a woman who is strong and wise, then he has some insecurity in *himself* that needs to be dealt with; it is not the woman's fault, nor her problem. The same applies to any woman who feels intimidated by a male who is strong and wise.

Neither gender gains anything when they deride, dishonour or don't appreciate the opposite sex. Both are needed and both are equal. We can appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of each person without there being any superiority or inferiority. In *love* we submit to (co-operate with) each other - it is *mutual*, meaning that males submit to females and vice versa (1 Peter 5:5). There is no place for the superiority of either gender.

God has a lot of extra work to do in redeeming and releasing us women from these lies: freeing us, healing us, loving us, building us up, strengthening us, showing us that we truly are valuable as women, and then sending us out as His emissaries and messengers! However, this article is not an in-depth study on the subject of women, for a scholarly and very thorough study on women and what the Bible has to say about them, I recommend Katherine Bushnell's book, "God's Word to Women": <http://godswordtowomen.org/gwtw.htm>.

It really is about time that all this discrimination and prejudice towards women came to an end. It is about time we stopped listening to and believing our enemy's agenda where women are concerned and instead began to believe God's agenda!

### **The Enemy's Agenda**

A common feature of religion (whether Churchianity, Islam, or any other religion) is the oppression of women: women must wear a veil, women can't be leaders, women aren't allowed in certain places, women mustn't be seen, women mustn't be heard, women must obey the men, women have no authority, etc. It seems like an awful lot of effort to subdue a gender considered so unimportant and inferior. You have to wonder what is so significant and important about women that the enemy has sought so consistently (and effectively) to silence and oppress them since the beginning of time!

Perhaps the answer as to why women have been the subject of so much attack and oppression lies in both the beginning and the end of the Bible. In Genesis 3:15 the enemy was told, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise



your head, and you shall bruise his heel." That is certainly the case and is *still happening* as the enemy tries to prevent the Son and His Life and Word from being delivered through a woman today. And the latter part of the prophecy is still happening also: Christ (the offspring of the woman) is crushing the enemy's head through the feet of strong women, revealing his lies for what they are, and bringing the message of Good News and Freedom to men and women alike: "The Lord gives the word [of power]; the women who bear *and* publish [the news] are a great host (army). The kings of the enemies' armies, they flee, they flee! (Psalm 68:11,12).

Women have been the target of the enemy since day one, and in Revelation 12 we see that the enemy is ALWAYS out to get the woman who carries the Son. The chapter ends with, "the dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

### **God's Agenda**

So, right throughout history women have been discriminated against. Females have been despised by men for centuries. But God... He chooses what man despises (1 Cor. 1:28). In the Bible we see how God seems to go out of His way to offend the rules of men where women are concerned and instead prove that women are just as important, honourable, and valuable as men. Just see how many times women in the Bible are specifically mentioned for having saved either the whole nation of Israel, or a family, or the lineage of Christ!

Take Esther, for example, a woman seemingly valued for only one thing: her attractive good looks. How many of us would think that a fashion model could be godly and save a whole nation? Or take Ruth, a despised immigrant; or Rahab, a woman used and abused by men as a prostitute; or Jael, who killed a man by hammering a tent peg through his head (she must have been very strong physically) and in doing so she fulfilled the prophecy of another woman: Deborah. And Abigail, who not only went behind her husband's back, but also spoke boldly to her future king (1 Sam. 25). Referring to this event Scott Brians has this to say, "Wisdom, by its nature, exercises authority. The silencer doctrine, to keep its theory, must claim that women should either (1) not have wisdom, or (2)

conceal the wisdom from the man she is commissioned to help. But Abigail was a bonafide helpmate in that she corrected her future husband. She was praised for it. Silencing wisdom is a grave mistake." (<http://his-kingdom.net/church/rethinking-women.pdf>).

And then there was Jesus... He broke so many of the religious and cultural rules that the religious leaders wanted to kill Him. He broke many of their laws about women: He spoke with a foreign woman without anybody else around (John 4:7-9). He spoke to a woman who was bleeding (considered unclean, Mark 5:25-34). He taught women (unheard of!) and allowed Mary to sit at His feet as a disciple, He also commended her for anointing Him and touching Him (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:3). He allowed an immoral woman to not only touch Him, but allowed her to kiss His feet repeatedly (Luke 7:36-39). He didn't do what the law required by either condemning or stoning a woman who had committed adultery, but instead He rescued and released her (John 8:4-11). With a woman who was bent over and crippled (Luke 13:11-16), Jesus laid His hands on her (broken law #1) healed her on the Sabbath (broken law #2) and called her a daughter of Abraham (broken law #3 as "sons of Abraham" was the "correct" term).

When Jesus was crucified, all of His disciples ran away, but there was a group of women who stayed: "Some women were there, watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James the younger and of Joseph), and Salome. They had been followers of Jesus and had cared for Him while He was in Galilee. Many other women who had come with Him to Jerusalem were also there." (Luke 15:40,41). It is interesting that Luke noted this and considered it important enough to record. Since none of the disciples were at the crucifixion of Jesus (John was there some of the time), we have to assume that the record we have of what happened, was witnessed and told by these women.

The women also accompanied the body to where Jesus was buried. After His resurrection Jesus revealed Himself to a woman first, and told her (and later the other women also) to go and tell the others that He was alive. This was the first "commission", a very important message, and it was (and still is) given to women: to tell others that Jesus is *alive!* It is recorded that the disciples did not believe them (Luke 24:11,12) and Jesus later rebuked them for their unbelief (Mark 16:14). Only John and

Peter ventured to go and see for themselves. The men may not have listened or believed due to their prejudice against women, and so missed out on immediately seeing the resurrected Christ. Now note: this still happens today - women tell what they have seen and heard from Christ, but prejudice can blind men from seeing and hearing Him through them.

It is very clear that women played an important role in the earthly ministry of Jesus; they provided Him with the resources that He needed: "Jesus travelled from one city and village to another. He spread the Good News about God's kingdom. The twelve apostles were with him. Also, some women were with Him. They had been cured from evil spirits and various illnesses. These women were Mary, also called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; Joanna, whose husband Chusa was Herod's administrator; Susanna; and many other women. *They provided financial support for Jesus and His disciples.*" (Luke 8:1-3). We tend to think of men as being the providers, but here it is recorded that it was *women* who provided for Jesus and His disciples!

### **More Valuable than Jewels...**

This brings us back to the strong and powerful woman spoken of in Proverbs 31. This woman was a business woman; she knew how to manage business affairs and how to make a profit: "She goes to inspect a field and buys it; with her earnings she plants a vineyard. She is energetic and strong, a hard worker. She makes sure her dealings are profitable; her lamp burns late into the night... She makes belted linen garments and sashes to sell to the merchants." That is very interesting, because everything I've read states that the women of the day were *not allowed* to own or buy land, or sell and trade! So the Jews must have considered this woman to be purely allegorical; otherwise it would have challenged their beliefs and practices where women were concerned.

The whole chapter speaks of a woman of strength, wealth, efficiency, ability, and wisdom. This woman is spoken of as being more valuable than rubies, but another "woman" in Proverbs is also spoken of as being more precious than jewels, or gold and silver: "How joyful is the man who finds Wisdom, and the man who gains Understanding, because her profit is better than the profit of silver and her yield than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire compares with her." (Prov.

3:13-15).

Who, in the Bible, is called Wisdom? Of course Christ Himself is (1 Cor. 1:24,30). So could chapter 31 of Proverbs be about Him, regardless of the gender? Rather than a list of things we are to aspire to or conform to, I see this as a list of characteristics that we see *in Him AND in His Beloved*: His Bride, His Wife (regardless of whether we are male or female). May we be ones of whom He can say, "Her Husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich His life. She brings Him good, not harm, all the days of her life... She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness... Her children stand and bless her. Her Husband praises her..."

**You women that bring messages to Zion, get up into the high mountain; you women that publish good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, don't be afraid, say to the cities of Judah, Here is your God! (Isaiah 40:9).**

*Although commentators and scholars agree that this verse uses the feminine gender, not one Bible translation has inserted "women" into this verse to be consistent with the original Hebrew. I have inserted it to maintain the original intention, encourage women to speak what God gives them, as well as to encourage men to receive what God gives them through women.*



# Being One

**In this new creation all distinctions vanish. There is no room for and there can be neither Greek nor Jew... nor slave or free man: but Christ is all and in all... Be gentle and forbearing with one another and, if one has a difference against another, readily pardoning each other; even as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also forgive. And above all these put on love and enfold yourselves with the bond of perfectness which binds everything together completely in ideal harmony. *Colossians 3:11-14***

Many agree that unity is lacking in the church. Many also try to create unity by having city-wide gatherings, combined pastors meetings, combined prayer meetings etc. and call that unity. This may have the look of unity, but true unity can only be found in the hearts of people. Only He who can change people's hearts can bring about true unity, not man, or you will have a fleshly, worldly substitute that may look like unity but is not. The world is unimpressed with seeing what looks like unity in religion and churches, what WILL impress them is when they see One Person through many...

We ARE One in Christ. Not two, not thousands and millions, but ONE for we are not speaking physically (of things earthly) but spiritually (of things heavenly). Christ is our common Denominator; not denominations! As our one Denominator from Him we receive our name and description (Christ's). We are One Body, One Temple, One Family, One City, One Couple.

Ephesians 4:3 says to strive to guard and keep the unity or oneness produced by the Spirit. It is not something we create; it is something which is *produced by the Spirit of God* and we then guard it. The verses above speak of Love as being the bond of perfectness and harmony. If we unite ourselves simply for unity's sake and through our own work, there will inevitably be compromise because we will not have been united by and through Christ, but FOR the sake of unity. Unity itself becomes the goal and the idol. Being united as a result of Christ within us is a totally different scenario because unity happens as a RESULT of Him

Who lives in us, not because we go seeking it and applying our own human effort to it!

Paul makes it clear that there are DIFFERENT gospels that are preached and DIFFERENT christs that are believed in. He was also pretty clear about separating from those who preached and believed a different gospel and Christ than that which he had preached, "They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!" (2 Tim. 3:5). Unity is not ever about compromise and accepting everyone who names the name of Christ (*many will call Him Lord and He will say He never knew them*) but unity IS about being joined together in the common bond of His Life within us.

The Truth (*who is Christ*) can never be compromised. It is Him as TRUTH and LIFE that we recognise in others because HE IS THE TRUTH and the LIFE and it is He Who is living in us! I'm not saying that I or anyone else knows all truth, but simply that we know Christ Who IS Truth because He lives within us so we then also recognise and bear witness to His Truth and His Life in others when we hear and see it! We are dwellings, houses for Him to live in. When someone opens the door of their life/house and you enter in to commune with them, you will either feel immediately at home because you find Him Whom you know and love living there; or the house may feel simply empty, or it will feel unfriendly and even hostile. If you don't recognise Him as the Truth or the Life in another, who says that they have Christ within and that you should unite with them? That may be why John wrote this startling statement:

*"We are children of God. Whoever is learning to know God listens to us (eg they recognise Him who is Truth!) and he who is NOT of God does not listen or pay attention to us. BY THIS we know and recognize the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error." (1 Jn 4:6).*

And Jesus said *"Whoever is of God listens to God [Those who belong to God hear the words of God]. This is the reason that you do not listen; because you do not belong to God and are not of God or in harmony with Him." (John 8:47).*

Those are pretty hard words... Jesus said: *"Do you suppose that I have come to bring peace upon earth? No, I say to you, rather division; for*

*from now on in one house there will be five divided among themselves, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother in law against her daughter in law and daughter in law against her mother in law. Lk 12:51-53. Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to part asunder a man from his father and a daughter from her mother and a newly married wife from her mother in law and a man's foes will be they of his own household." Matt 10:34-36. Hard words!*

He caused a lot of division among the religious people of His day, So *there arose a division and dissension among the people concerning Him. John 7:43* He was even said to be demonised and mad. *Then a fresh division of opinion arose among the Jews because of His saying these things. And many of them said, He has a demon and He is mad. Why do you listen to Him? John 10:19,20.* Not only did Jesus cause division, but Paul did too! *And he went into the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, persuading and arguing about the kingdom of God. But when some became more and more stubborn, discrediting and speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he separated himself from them, taking the disciples with him, and went on holding daily discussion in the lecture room of Tyrannus. Acts 19:8,9* When he said this, *an angry dispute arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the whole assembly was divided into two factions. Acts 23:7* The early followers of Christ were controversial! *But the residents of the town were divided, some siding with the Jews, and some with the apostles. Acts 14:4*

In the church's history there has always been division regarding the things that God is doing. Paul in 1 Cor 11:18,19 said *"I hear that there are cliques and divisions among you; and I in part believe it, for doubtless there have to be factions among you in order that they who are genuine and of approved fitness may become evident and plainly recognised among you."* This shouldn't surprise us as Jesus told us He didn't come to bring peace to the earth, to individuals definitely, but not to the earth/world. Light divides. It will always be separated from darkness.

You can imagine them saying in Jesus day that He couldn't possibly be the Messiah who was meant to be the Prince of Peace because He was

disturbing the peace and dividing families and the leaders of their religion! The Jews didn't recognise that their Messiah was right in their midst, He became a stumbling block to them as Isaiah had said He would, *"He shall be a sanctuary to those who reverently fear and trust in Him; but He shall be a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble thereon; and they shall fall and be broken and be snared and taken."* Is 8:14,15. And Peter said *"To you then who believe is the preciousness (of Him); but for those who disbelieve, the very Stone which the builders rejected has become the main Cornerstone, and a Stone that will (future tense!) cause stumbling and a Rock that will give men offence; they stumble because they disobey and disbelieve God's Word as those who reject Him were destined and appointed to do."* 1 Pet 2:7,8. We need to beware that we ourselves are not guilty of spiritual prejudice, self righteousness and holding onto our traditions which will make us do the very same thing as the Pharisees in Jesus' day.

The divisions that Paul did warn about were to do with following a man instead of Jesus Christ which is exactly the problem that is rampant in churches today: *"But I urge you brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you be in perfect harmony in what you say and that there be no divisions or factions among you but that you be perfectly united in your common understanding and in your judgments. For... there are contentions and factions among you. What I mean is this, that each one of you says, I belong to Paul or I belong to Apollos, or I belong to Peter or I belong to Christ. Is Christ divided into parts? Was Paul crucified on behalf of you? ...So then, as it is written, Let him who boasts and glories, boast and glory in the Lord. 1 Cor 1:10-13,31. For when one says I belong to Paul, and another, I belong to Apollos, are you not proving yourselves unchanged men? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Ministering servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord appointed to each his task: I planted, Apollos watered, but God was making it grow and He gave the increase."* 1 Cor 3:4-6.

Unity is the result and by-product of Christ and His Life and Love. It is the fruit and resulting growth of One Life in us. Love, as we know it in its natural, human form, is basically selfish. It is all centered around me; I love to be loved, I need to be loved, I want to be loved; it is self-centred



and self satisfying. If we love others in this selfish, self-serving way, God will often take us out of those relationships in order to deal with our self love until we have His Love as the foundation in our lives. THEN He has the right foundation on which to build deeper relationships and we can love our brothers and sisters as He intends us to.

God's love in us is the OPPOSITE to natural human love, it is all about GIVING and not receiving, it is not selfish but is self-giving, laying down your life. *"This is My commandment: that you love one another just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to lay down (give up) his own life for his friends."* John 15:12,13.

Loving others as He wants us to, is all about giving away yourself and being vulnerable and open to others which is the antithesis of the other kind of love which is about protecting yourself and remaining aloof. The irony of understanding this is that people (*especially in Christian circles*) are sometimes taught NOT to develop close relationships with brothers and sisters, not to become too familiar with them or they will regret it and be hurt. This is nothing short of a lie of the enemy in order to prevent love and unity in the Body. We are COMMANDED to love one another, we are ALLOWED to love one another, we are FREE to love one another; 'against such there is no law' (Galatians 5:23)!

**I wish those who unsettle and confuse you would go all the way and cut themselves off! For you, brethren, were indeed called to FREEDOM; only DO NOT let your freedom be an incentive to your flesh and an opportunity or excuse for selfishness, but through LOVE you should serve one another. For the whole Law [concerning human relationships] is complied with in the one precept, You shall love your neighbor as you do yourself. Galatians 5:12-14**



# Being Family

We are referred to again and again as the children of God in the Bible. Obviously this is for a purpose and is no accident! We can think about how healthy families function and draw comparisons and understanding from them which apply to the Family of God here on earth, today. Family is defined as being a primary social group consisting of parents and their offspring, a group of persons related by blood and descended from a common ancestor. Obviously, to be a member of God's family means that He has made you His child, that He is your Father and you have been born into His family. Birth is primary and essential. If we have not been born from above, then we do not have our Father's Life in us.

Family speaks of close, intimate relationships within a community. God has given each of us an inbuilt desire for this kind of relationship with Him and with each other, but this desire so often goes unfulfilled. Many recognize this lack of community and try to correct the lack with things like co-housing projects, churches, cults, sects, communes, clubs, fellowships etc. Of course of all communities which ought to truly exemplify this type of close relationship above all others, it ought to be the family of God! But what is too often missing is the glue - the Life and Love of God. If we don't know our Father and don't have His Life in us, we won't know how to recognize either His Life or His Love. When we have experienced and know Him and His Love, then we in turn love as He loves: extravagantly!

Often an intimate relationship with God is not cultivated or established before close relationships with other people; the result being that we love people more than we love God and we know the ones we love more than we know God Himself. Part of the reason for this is our natural tendency to look for fulfilment in people we can see instead of in God who we don't see. God is love, and we too are the very impersonation of His love if He is indeed living in us! But this love is not a sentimental love, but a true love, the love which comes from God. God's love is a tough love and a giving love. He will tell us and show us the truth even when it hurts. Any parent knows that honesty is very important when dealing with their

children.

Your family does not live separated from all other families in the world, you interact with others. So too, this supernatural Family of God is not exclusive, but inclusive. Families share their lives and meals with others who are not part of their family. They are usually hospitable and share what they have with others. But so called Christian communities have typically been exclusive and inward looking instead of inclusive and outward looking. Possibly part of the reason for this is that community can become a thing in itself and be the sole vision and reason for being together. True Christian community is a natural outworking of the Family of God, not a goal or vision in itself! And as such it does not seclude itself away from the world, but is open to sharing lives and meals etc with others, for this is what their Father wants them to do! They do not live in fear of being contaminated by the world, they live in the freedom and security of their Father!

No organisation or institution can replace simply being a family. The family of God is meant to be just that; ONE family who share their lives together with the ONE Father with all the children being part of a healthy, functioning, world-wide family! Families don't normally get together formally at a set time every week all to sit quietly and listen to only one or two members speak (*& usually the SAME ones every week at that!*) as occurs in the church. If we heard of a family that was like that, we'd call it very dysfunctional, authoritarian and feel very sorry for the poor children! Healthy families have many informal times when they get together, often over a meal or family celebrations. They do sometimes have more formal, celebration times together but these are usually infrequent, even annual.

They also have healthy debates and discussions over different matters and although not all agree, they are still one family. Sometimes there will be conflict (*as in any family where children are encouraged to grow and express themselves!*) and disagreements. When you are upset with a brother or sister and think they've done something wrong, what do you normally do in a family? You take the matter to your Father! HE deals with it, not you. If you think your brother or sister is really wrong, you tell your Father - not your other brothers and sisters - it's not their job to deal with it, it's the Parent's job!

This doesn't mean of course that our Father WON'T correct us through our brothers or sisters, but rather that the process is to go to Him FIRST, and if He wants another brother or sister to deal with you instead of directly handling it Himself, He will tell them so! So you can safely leave the annoying brother or sister with Him! And it is usually the children who are still immature that fight a lot or get upset easily. The younger a child is, the more selfish and self-centered they are, and the more argumentative and immature they tend to be...

*We love Him because He first loved us. If anyone says, I love God and hates and detests his brother in Christ, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God Whom he has not seen. And this command we have from Him: that he who loves God shall love his brother (believer) also. 1 John 4:19-21.* This is the kind of love which loves in spite of what a person may be like or how they may offend or upset us! True love is selfless, we must die to self if we want God's love to flow through us. Children in families don't always get on with each other ALL of the time; but they still have a deep love for each other that immediately springs to the fore should their brother or sister be in danger or threatened in some way. They KNOW that they are part of the family and must treat each other with love and respect, appreciating each other.

When you are a member of a family, you don't have to prove it to anyone. You KNOW that you are a loved and accepted member of the family because you KNOW and have a close relationship with your Father yourself! He is the One that assures you of your place in His Family. This is a vital truth for all believers to grasp, because realising who you are as a son or daughter of God deals with so much mess that is seen in many individual's lives. It deals with insecurity, rejection and competitiveness. When you're part of a family, you don't have to prove anything! There is nothing you can DO to be or remain part of the Family, you already ARE! You just simply need to BE the person you are and fulfil your role in the family! And when you meet new brothers and sisters you often just KNOW that they are a brother or sister, no one needs to convince you because you simply know that there is that connection there.

In reading how the family of God treated each other as brothers and sisters in the Bible, love is mentioned often! Paul wrote: *being tenderly and affectionately desirous of you, we continued to share with you not*

*only God's good news but also our own lives as well, for you had become so very dear to us...but since we were bereft of you, brethren, for a little while in person, of course not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great longing to see you face to face. But now Timothy has just come back to us from his visit to you and has brought us the good news of your faith and the warmth of your love and reported how kindly you cherish a constant and affectionate remembrance of us and that you are longing to see us as we are to see you. 1 Thessalonians 2:8,17, 3:6*

Unfortunately, the church, church leaders and more recently 'spiritual fathers and mothers', have often put themselves in the place of God and have simply set themselves up as the Parent. This is seen very clearly in the history of the church, pastors used to be *(and some still are)* called Fathers. As a result, many people have been "born" into the church system or converted to a doctrine of man instead of into the family of God. New babies *(new brothers and sisters)* are NOT EVER, EVER born from existing brothers and sisters in a family, they can only come from the Parents!

Jesus clearly said that we have ONE Father! *But you are not to be called rabbi (teacher), for you have one Teacher and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth father, for you have one Father, Who is in heaven. And you must not be called masters (leaders), for you have one Master and Leader, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant. Matthew 23:8-11.* God is sufficient and no man can be a spiritual father instead of Him, to say otherwise is idolatrous - we are replacing God with a man! Jesus over and over again spoke of the Father, and us as HIS children occurs over and over again right throughout the Bible, and Jesus spoke of us as His brothers and sisters! Clearly He may use someone to teach or father us but that person must be simply the conduit and vessel while always pointing to the One Father and Teacher.

He also tells us not to call anyone 'master' or 'guide and teacher' because GOD is to be those things to us! How it must grieve our Father's heart to see His children running to men in search of a father instead of to Him who is the best Father of all! Paul refers to Timothy as being his child in the Lord and says to the Corinthians: *After all, though you should have ten thousand teachers and guides to direct you in Christ, yet you do not*

*have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. For this very cause I sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and trustworthy child in the Lord, 1 Corinthians 4:15,17.* Timothy and the others had been spiritually birthed and born into God's family through Paul, he was their father IN and through Christ Jesus, not instead of God.

Reproduction is a creative thing, a supernatural, spiritual thing that only God as our Father can do. Paul was only their spiritual father in the sense that he had been instrumental in bringing them into Life like a midwife, but he wasn't their spiritual father in the sense that it was not HIS spirit and life that had been birthed in them but GOD'S - a big and important difference! Paul also said: *Pattern yourselves after me, follow my example, as I imitate and follow Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1.* The Greek word for 'follow' used here actually means to imitate! This gives a different understanding on that verse as he wasn't saying follow me (*become my followers and I will be your leader*) but imitate me as I imitate Christ!

Only our Father can give us sonship and birth us into His Family. Paul did not claim to be like a father lightly. He LIKENS himself three times to being LIKE a father (1 Thess 2:11, 2 Cor 12:14 & Phil 2:22) and there are a few verses where the apostles in their writings say 'little children' but they FAR more frequently called others their brothers and sisters! Paul more commonly recognised that he was their brother! Earlier in this same chapter (verse 6) he calls them brothers. In fact he keeps referring to them as his brothers all the time, in 1 Corinthians alone, he calls them brothers 28 times and his beloved children only ONCE!

Yes, there HAS been a lack of fathering and bad fathers and this causes insecurity and creates a deep need for approval from man in people. But another person, no matter HOW spiritual or mature, is not to fill that gap or play that role, but only our Father above! We must look to Him, only HE can heal those wounds and make us whole and be the Father we really need. He may well touch someone through us in a fatherly way, revealing His heart. All we need is to be secure in who we are in Him and to seek HIS approval instead of man's. GOD wants to be that father and to give each of us a true, deep security in knowing that HE approves of us and loves us - and no one else can provide that for us. Even being totally practical; how many real fathers can one child have??? The

answer is ONE! This also applies to who is the head a Body. You can only ever have ONE Head! It is a physical impossibility to have more than one biological father, others may be fatherly towards us, but you can only ever have ONE father! The same is true spiritually. If we are really born of the Spirit of God, only HE can be our Father.

Elijah, Moses and Paul are the most common examples for the spiritual fathers teaching, and yet NONE of these 'spiritual fathers' had a spiritual father themselves! Some say that spiritual fathers are to reproduce themselves but Paul spoke of travelling until CHRIST was formed, NOT himself!!! Another way of looking at spiritual reproduction is to use the illustration that Jesus used several times - of planting seed. A seed will reproduce after its own kind, but the life is not from the planter or US - we simply plant it or give it away.

The difficulty with calling anyone your spiritual father is that THEY can become a substitute and are looked to for what only our Father in heaven wants to give us - security, protection, direction, nurture, love and approval - and, because they are viewed as the source of these things instead of God, they also get the glory instead of God! We do have to grow up and mature spiritually and we can be used to encourage and help nurture immature siblings in their growing (*watering them*). However, the apostles always pointed to God and not to themselves, they were there to serve; not to be served. Paul wrote: *My little children, for whom I am again suffering birth pangs until Christ is completely and permanently formed within you Gal. 4:19*. His apostolic mission was not to reproduce himself, but to bring the Life of Christ forth so that HE would be formed in others - that they would be born of the Spirit of God.

In playing God in the fertility area, some leaders "create" new ideas, programmes and methods and plant these seeds into "their" children. This is artificial. When the real, created idea from God comes along, because so many leaders in the church have set themselves up as the parents over the children in their little family instead of simply being brothers and sisters in one BIG family, they often don't recognise this new thing as being part of THEIR family because it either wasn't given to THEM first or it didn't originate from them. So they say it cannot be of God, and attempt to kill what God is trying to raise up in a person or persons.

If there was true humility present in recognising that we simply are brothers and sisters, then they would recognise that God can and DOES do different things in His Family, and that it doesn't have to be checked out with other children first or originate from them! The problem is that many set themselves up as parents who think they are responsible for "their children", rather than recognising that THEY themselves are simply one of the children - brothers or sisters of the ONE Father! It is the Parent's role to reproduce, but brothers and sisters ARE often the ones that teach children new things in a big family and may be responsible to look after younger brothers and sisters sometimes.

Going back to the healthy, functioning family, there is no insecurity there, each child knows that their Father loves them no more and no less than any other brother or sister, they are accepted - not for what they have or haven't done, or for their maturity or lack thereof, but simply because they are a precious child in this Family! And if a brother or sister wants to try something new or different, they are encouraged in that! In fact, older more mature brothers and sisters may be able to help them out and encourage them because they are secure in who they are and what they know and can offer whatever help they can from a heart filled with love. A healthy family is a safe place, a loving place where each individual is encouraged to reach their full potential, where each child has their own intimate, loving relationship with their Father first, and with each other second.

**Therefore be imitators of God, copy Him and follow His example, as well beloved children imitate their Father. And walk in love, esteeming and delighting in one another as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a slain offering and sacrifice to God, a sweet fragrance. *Ephesians 5:1,2***





# Being Loved

**We... are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first. 1 John 4:19.**

All of us have an innate need and desire to be loved and appreciated simply for who we are; not because of what we do or can give another person. Use does not define importance or acceptance; Love IS acceptance and importance! To be loved builds a person up; it is only when we know we are loved, that we in turn can truly love! Our culture speaks often of love, but it is more a sentimental and emotional substitute for real love - and therefore unstable and untrue.

Grace, love and mercy are all attributes of God but there are also our natural versions of all of these which we create and feel as emotions. Emotions are not the source though; our emotions are merely our *reactions* to outward stimuli; eg we see someone hurting so we react by feeling merciful, or someone takes advantage of us and we react by feeling angry. Even on the best of days our feelings and emotions can be fickle and unreliable but I also know that Father can really use them so I asked Him about this. He told me that our feelings are like water: easily swayed, easily changed; peaceful or turbulent - depending upon which circumstances or people may stimulate the water at any given moment in time.

Water can be heated and feel hot, or chilled and feel cold; but it is still water regardless of how it feels. It is liquid and conforms to the shape of its container. We are like containers for this water/emotions. Some of us have holes caused by circumstances and are emptier than others when it comes to emotions, others of us are full to the brim and ready to splash out at the least bit of movement on our containers. But both of those examples are controlled by what *happens* to us, ie controlled by outward circumstances and not by Christ. He was not affected by His own emotions even though He was human like us; not when His mother came to see Him nor when Lazarus died, He wasn't moved by His own emotions or other people's emotions; it wasn't until the Holy Spirit moved Him that He wept...

In Him we need to learn to not allow the waters of our emotions to be stirred or to react to anything other than the Spirit of God moving upon the water... If we rely on our feelings, we will be all over the place because they are not stable and cannot be relied upon, nor are they a source but merely a reaction to surroundings. When we walk by our own nature, then our emotions will be governed by our natural belief system and what we think; our emotions will react accordingly to "confirm" our beliefs even if our beliefs are completely wrong! When we walk by the Holy Spirit and are stirred by Him, then our emotions won't be governed by what we think and believe to be true, but by what God knows as Truth and that is so often completely the opposite to what we'd think!

In organized religion there are usually two extremes; "you can't trust your feelings", through to "this feels like God therefore it IS God". Both extremes are just another form of bondage to Self. Our emotions need to be *redeemed* through death and resurrection; just like everything else about us. "There are those who think that fellowship with Christ in His death means a lessening of sensitiveness and power to feel, while others rebel against this thought and say they do not believe in the eliminating of the "emotional" in spiritual experience. The life of the Lord Himself, and especially the letters of Paul, show us clearly the true balance between these two extremes. In the first case, the truth is that fellowship with Christ in His death simply delivers us from undue self-sensitiveness and sets us free to be increasingly and acutely sensitive for all that concerns Christ and others! And in the second case, all that is needed is that the surface emotionalism be taken away, so that the very deepest depths of the whole inmost being may be opened for the life of God to be poured out for souls." (*Jessie Penn-Lewis*).

Religion is very good at stimulating and stirring our emotions... and the results can look for all the world like the real thing and yet be a completely false substitute. Religion is all about man trying to please God through what we do so we think if we do the right thing, we are righteous. It is clear that there needs to be a separation between what is of God and what is just us and this is brought about through the ultimate separation: death. If we have not died to what we want and to what we think should be done, we will continue to be governed by Self instead of by our new Life: Christ.

Often we deceive ourselves into thinking that we are good and righteous by our "right" actions; there may be a situation or circumstance which always upsets us but we can choose, through our own self control and will power, not to let those emotions be seen or act upon them. But inside is where the real person is. If the attitude is in our hearts then it is as though we had acted upon it. It is our *hearts* that need dealing with! Jesus was very clear about this - see Mark 7:21-23, also: Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28; 15:8; Mark 10:20-22 - as a man thinks in his heart, so is he! We usually try in our own strength to do the right thing when all the time it is the heart that is not right. When our heart has been dealt with, then the right actions and emotions follow.

Since we can control our actions it can all be just an act; but our *reactions* often reveal what is really in the heart. We may act loving and appear to be full of grace and yet the whole time we may be thinking ungracious and unloving thoughts because of what is really in the heart. If our hearts are right and pure, then our actions and reactions will be right and pure. Clearly we cannot do this; it is NOT in us. We can't help who we are and cannot change our hearts or our nature; it is impossible. Only God can do this miracle, and when He does, all we can do is stand back in awe and admire what He has done, knowing full well that this is *His work* and not our own! What is created and produced by God is eternal and of a completely different nature than the best we can come up with; what He produces is living and reproductive whereas what we produce is temporal and dies.

Some people say that being loving, gracious, kind etc are choices; but I know that I cannot truly *be* any of those, even if I choose them. I cannot love as God loves just because I choose to; I cannot be gracious as God is gracious just because I choose to. *It is not in me!* And if I could do it, then it would be man-made and I could control it. If I choose to be gracious, loving, merciful or whatever, then to me that is artificial and is *from me*: it is *my* choice and the result of *my* work and *my* will power. If I can choose to love others, and do it, then who is the source of it? And if it was my choice then who can take the credit and glory for it? Conversely, if I know it has nothing to do with me and is God's work in changing me from the inside out, then He and He alone gets all the credit.

Jesus said we did not choose Him but He chose us. If I choose, then

who, really, is in control and who is governing my life? But that said, we *do* make choices all the time; often without being aware of it. How do we make those unconscious choices? *From who we are*. And this is what God is always after: the heart issues, the internal before the external. Those choices or heart responses come from somewhere much deeper than just our head and our will power.

While we do appear to make choices for Christ, I see that that happens not because I have the will power to choose, but because *He* has first chosen me and loved me and my heart is simply smitten through Love and so chooses Him by default! I cannot help but "choose" Him... those "choices" come from my heart and my desire for Him rather than from me. True Love cannot be forced or enforced; by its very nature it must be given freely and willingly.

The picture which beautifully illustrates this is Mary and Martha. Jesus said of Mary that she had chosen the best thing. I don't think it was a conscious choice on her part though: "I choose to annoy my sister and choose to sit at Jesus' feet"! No, it was a *heart* choice, a simple heart response because of her love for Him... she couldn't help but be found at His feet because her heart had chosen for her; in one sense she had no choice, she *had* to be at His side!

When our heart chooses like that, then there is real freedom and life, but when WE decide to choose (usually because we feel we should!), then it is a bondage because our heart is not really in it and we are the "strength" and "source" instead of God. Religion is all too good at getting us to make that kind of choice with many "should's" (thou shalt) and "should not's" which the Old Covenant was full of. But God promised that in the New Covenant things would be different: "But this is the covenant which **I will** make with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, **I will** put My law within them, and on their hearts **I will** write it; and **I will** be their God, and they will be My people." (Jer 31:33). Today it is about what HE will do in us and through us; we cannot keep the law, we cannot be righteous, we cannot love... but HE WILL be faithful to do that work in us which He has begun!

God is always, *a/ways* all the way through the Bible, after the heart! The Bible teaches us that the issues of Life come from the heart, rivers of

living water flow from the heart, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks... and perhaps the heart chooses also. We naturally think of choosing as being a head function but I suggest that it may really be a heart function. When the heart is right, then the whole life is right. But for the heart to be right there must come a separation between what is from God, and what is from me.

The picture of creation in Genesis is an example of what needs to happen in M.E. - My Earth. My emotions are like the waters with the Spirit of God hovering over them. God says "Light BE!" and there is Light and I see some things. Then God says "Let there be a separation between the waters above from the waters below" and the expanse between the two is separated by the Spirit; the Air or the Wind.

It is only *after* this separation of the heavenly from the earthly that fruit is brought forth: "God said, Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed and fruit trees yielding fruit whose seed is in itself, each according to its kind, upon the earth. And it was so." It is the same in M.E. It is only when God has made the separation in me between what is of Him and what is of my earthly nature, that He can then release me and create His Garden in me to bear His fruit.

The fruit He bears in any of us is far greater and deeper and fuller than any of our human substitute "fruits".

Grace is much more than an emotion stimulated by compassion.

Mercy is much more than an emotion stimulated by pity.

Love is much more than an emotion stimulated by kinship.

Joy is much more than an emotion stimulated by happiness.

Peace is much more than an emotion stimulated by solitude.

Kindness is much more than an emotion stimulated by caring.

Goodness is much more than an emotion stimulated by doing the right thing.

Meekness is much more than an emotion stimulated by putting others first.

Faithfulness is much more than an emotion stimulated by loyalty.

These fruits of the Spirit must be the results of His Life and not ours. God must be the Stimulator, Originator, Creator and Source of our emotions

rather than them being the fruit of our own cultivation and simulation. All of these fruits are so, so much deeper and larger and greater than any person's emotions, because they are attributes of God Himself; characteristics which He desires to stir up and reproduce in the emotions of His children by and through His Spirit.

When my emotions are governed by my own Self (as we all are naturally) I am imprisoned and tortured. When my emotions are governed by God (the work *He* does in me) then I am released and free to live daily in amazing Peace and Rest - Christ - Who is the Author and Completer of this work!

How does He do this? One of the most effective ways I have seen Him do this in me and others, is by opening our eyes to increasingly see and experience Who He is: He is unending, unlimited, incomprehensible Love! While we may "know" in our head that He loves us, it is only when we truly begin to *personally experience* being loved by Him in so many ways, that we are able to extend this same Love to others! There is something about Him and His Love which just reproduces itself. Being loved, enables us to love. Now it is all about what *He* does and has done and will do rather than what *we* should do; we are simply the recipients and responders of unlimited Grace and Love!

Being loved and accepted is absolutely crucial to every human being and our Father knows this; He also knows that He is the only one who loves perfectly. Good fathers want to simply enjoy their children and do things with them and for them rather than selfishly use them. And there is a world of difference between a child voluntarily and spontaneously doing something nice for his or her father out of love rather than out of duty or obligation. He is our *Father* and He loves us with a passion and wants to bring us into communion with Himself, to work alongside Him, to cooperate with Him - isn't that amazing?!

To experience being loved by Him is to know true Love and true Love is irresistible! God *is* Love. Love gives; it does not use. To use somebody suggests that the person isn't important; only that they can be of some use and benefit to you. Being used makes the used person feel inferior (which feeds a desire to be worthy and valued) while it makes the user feel superior (which feeds a desire to be in control).

To walk in partnership (koinonia) with somebody means that you learn to accept and appreciate them simply for who they are; not for what they can do for you or can give you. The father does not expect the child to do more than what he knows they are capable of for their age, instead the father delights in having his child work with him, learning from his example, because they thoroughly enjoy each other's company and because they love each other.

Many people say they want to be used by God but this can be just a natural, carnal desire to feel useful and valued. Not many people say they want to be loved by God... and yet to be loved by God is something very precious indeed. It is only by experiencing His Love that we will begin to understand something of our true value to Him. Love simply *loves* without needing a reason to love!

However, even though I don't much like the word "use", I still use it! If we're thinking individually then 'use' is not a good word, but if we're thinking corporately, as in corpus Christi, the body of Christ, then the word "use" is not only okay, it is absolutely vital and necessary. I am using my fingers to type this, my hands had to be used. You will be using your eyes to read it. That is not a negative thing, but a very positive thing because my hands are part of ME and were used spontaneously by my head! Your eyes are part of YOU! They are not something separate from you which you use. When we are part of Christ's body, it is essential and good that we are used as our Head decides (without consulting each part!). Every part of our human body gets used every day and we think nothing of it! And I think it ought to be like that in Christ's Body too, He uses different members to do or say different things and we think nothing of it because it is normal and right that it happens, it is a natural function of the one Body.

Our emotions are one way in which Christ can express Himself through us as His Body but only when we have allowed Him to pour our emotions out, to pour us into Himself and into His river where we become one with all the other water and are then governed not by what happens to our little container, but by the direction in which God has us flowing - we are one with Him in His emotions! It is easy to manipulate and cause havoc in a small bucket of water, it is not easy to move or disturb that water when it has been thrown into a large river.

Shallow waters are easily agitated, but down in the depths the waters rarely move much, only the surface gets disturbed. I'm reminded of when Jesus was sleeping in the boat getting tossed about in the storm... and He just spoke one phrase which brought absolute calm. It is a picture of looking and listening for Him in our storms! We're usually all agitated and saying "Wake up, can't You see I'm in trouble here? Don't You care???" instead of just knowing He is there, trusting Him and even falling asleep (resting) right along with Him instead of trying to save ourselves. Can you imagine one of the men on that boat *not* being anxious? It is not in us... really! As they said: "What kind of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!" He can speak to nature and it obeys, He can also speak to our nature and bring Peace there too! The Greek words for "peace be still" are interesting when relating them to ourselves and our stormy seas or emotions because the two words He used fit perfectly: "Be silent, be muzzled". It means to stop the mouth, make speechless, reduce to silence; and to become speechless, to be kept in check.

I think it is very comforting to hear Jesus saying those words to me and to all my thoughts and emotions in the midst of a storm... reducing all to silence... experiencing instead the perfect peace and rest of His deep Love and care for me, so that I love, hear and see only Him...

**Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that. My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God. *Ephesians 5:1; 3:14.***





# Being Springs of Living Water

**The Holy Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who is listening say, Come! And let everyone come who is thirsty; and whoever earnestly desires to do it, let him come, take, appropriate and drink the water of Life without cost. Revelation 22:17**

Water is an essential ingredient for life! It is absolutely vital, so vital that without it, we die. The Bible tells us that God is the Fountain of Life and Living Water. Without Him and His Life/Water; we are dead.

Jesus used Living Water as an example of Himself: *Jesus answered her, If you had only known and had recognized God's gift and Who this is that is saying to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water. She said to Him, Sir, You have nothing to draw with [no bucket] and the well is deep; how then can You provide living water? (John 4:10-11).* The Samaritan woman did not understand or comprehend WHO Jesus was or what He was saying, just as we often don't understand today. There is a place of resting and relying and depending on God which is like a spring of Life in us which is the opposite of depending on our own works represented by drawing water with a bucket from the well! Not only are wells hard work to build, they are also hard to draw water out of and you need to use something as a tool, like a bucket (method or programme). Often only one person at a time will do this and will distribute the water to others.

This depicts how many people drink the waters from the wells of salvation; they depend upon others to draw the water up and give it to them (eg a pastor or teacher) or they will strive and work to draw forth water themselves. People must come to know the Source for themselves instead of relying on others. The woman went on to ask in verse 12: *Are You greater than and superior to our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well and who used to drink from it himself, and his sons and his cattle also?* What was wrong with this old, traditional way of getting water anyway? She had no idea that the Person she was speaking to was far greater and more superior to Jacob!

Was Jesus saying that His new way was better than the old way? YES! And yet we too often respond in the same way as this woman when challenged with simply relying upon Him and drinking from Him for ourselves and having HIM as our Source instead of other people. It is because we have not had our eyes opened to see Who He is. The woman of Samaria had no revelation of Who she was addressing. She did not KNOW or recognise Him just as we often don't today: *Therefore My people go into captivity without knowing it and because they have NO knowledge of God. And their honorable men are famished, and their common people are parched with thirst. (Isaiah 5:13).*

Jesus then addressed a serious problem: *Jesus said to her, Go call your husband and come back here. The woman answered, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You have spoken truly in saying, I have no husband. For you have had five husbands, and the man you are now living with is not your husband. In this you have spoken truly. (John 4:16-18).* One thing that is sure to blind us is spiritual adultery because it is idolatry. Spiritual adultery is esteeming, loving, respecting, honouring ANY PERSON above or before Christ. He is returning for a Bride who is fully committed to and in love with HIM, not for a Bride who has eyes only for herself or for human substitutes (idols)!

*The woman said to Him, Sir, I see and understand that You are a prophet. Our forefathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary and proper to worship. (John 4:19,20).* She saw that Jesus was a prophet, but still DIDN'T see that He was the Christ! As a result she still had an old mindset that was concerned about where the proper place to worship was. And today, we still do the SAME! It is not important WHERE we worship but WHO we worship! If she had realised that she was speaking to Christ, she would have understood that she could worship Him right where she was, beside the well!

*Jesus said to her, Woman, believe Me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You do not know what you are worshiping. We do know what we are worshiping for salvation comes from among the Jews. A time will come, however, indeed it is already here, when the true, genuine worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth (reality); for the Father is seeking just such*

*people as these as His worshipers. God is a Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (reality). (John 4:21-24). The place of worship is not important, what God is seeking is places of worship that are living temples/buildings (i.e. us) made by God and not man, where He dwells in truth and reality. These worshipers will worship Him in truth and reality - free from pretence, simulation, falsehood and deceit.*

*The woman said to Him, I know that Messiah is coming, He who is called the Christ (the Anointed One); and when He arrives, He will tell us everything we need to know and make it clear to us. (John 4:25). Jesus had just been doing exactly that, and yet she had still not KNOWN or SEEN Him! Sometimes we can be so blind. We have eyes to see and yet do not see, we have ears to hear, and yet do not hear as Jesus and Isaiah said. It is only when God in His grace opens our eyes and ears to hear and see WHO Christ is that we can say as the woman did, "Is not this CHRIST, the Messiah, the Anointed One?" Mere head knowledge is never enough! We must experience and know the Truth as the Person of Christ in order for there to be reality in our hearts and lives.*

*The end result of this woman's personal revelation of Christ was: Now numerous Samaritans from that town believed in and trusted in Him because of what the woman said when she declared and testified, He told me everything that I ever did. So when the Samaritans arrived, they asked Him to remain with them and He did stay there two days. Then many more believed in and relied on Him because of His personal message [what He Himself said]. And they told the woman, Now we no longer believe and have faith because of what YOU said; for WE have heard Him ourselves personally, and we know that He truly is the Savior of the world, the CHRIST! (John 4:39-42). She immediately ran off and TOLD people about Him! She led them to Him through the words of her testimony and they believed when they personally heard and saw Him for themselves!*

### **A Well or a Spring?**

We too are bearers of this good news, and we lead others to the Source of Living Water Himself. Drinking the Living Water (Christ) from someone else will not quench the thirst for long, you have to keep going back to the

person for more - it can create a dependency if people look to the vessel as the source instead of having the Fountain of Living Water flowing from within as the Source. The Living Water is given not only to quench our thirst, but also to flow through us to others, to be poured forth in order to draw people to the Fountain of Life. But this water must be fresh spring water...

*My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and they have hewn for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns which cannot hold water. (Jeremiah 2:13).* Cisterns in Old Testament times are defined as being artificial reservoirs dug in the earth for the collection and storage of water from rain or a spring. However, drinking from a reservoir of water is not the same as drinking from a fountain or spring. Cisterns speak of something that has been *made by man* and is therefore artificial, instead of being naturally produced and sustained by God. It is referring to stored water instead of fresh, flowing water.

In order to store water, much effort and work must go into digging and creating the storage place. This can be likened to drinking water that has been brought about by the striving and work of man instead of relying on God. God calls this evil; perhaps because it can be indicative of a lack of trust and dependence on the Source to always be there and to be constant. A well must be dug and takes a lot of work to even draw water from it whereas a spring is a natural outflow of ground water; something which bubbles forth of its own accord! A well is something which can dry up, but springs keep on going!

Spring water comes from deeper within the earth than well water and is full of minerals and goodness. Springs take little or no effort, they simply gush and bubble forth. Not only is God referred to as a fountain or spring (the Hebrew word for both is the same word) but so are His children because He who IS the Fountain of Life is dwelling within us by the Holy Spirit!

So, what do we know about the natural qualities of water physically that we show us what we ourselves are to be spiritually? Water is clear and transparent. It has no form of its own, it easily moulds to other shapes - adapts to other people and circumstances. It has no flavour, colour, smell

or taste of its own. It is a neutral substance. It can be gentle and refreshing, or very strong and powerful. When water is poured into water; it is immediately merged together with no distinction. When we have His water pouring through us and join with others who are doing the same, we can become a powerful force of water together instead of merely a trickle! We are all to have rivers of Living Water gushing and flowing from us, WE are meant to be fountains of this Life-giving water to others!

Going back to the Samaritan woman, *Jesus answered her, All who drink of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever takes a drink of the water that I will give him shall never, no never, be thirsty any more. But the water that I will give him shall become a spring of water welling up (flowing and bubbling) continually within him into and for eternal life.* (John 4:13,14). Drinking water from the old wells of our own, or other's work or methods, will not fulfil or satisfy. Only HE can satisfy and quench that thirst by becoming a flowing and bubbling spring of Life within us!

God's words, spoken in His time and with His authority, will perform all that He requires them to, and in nature rain is one way in which God produces and sustains life. Rain is representative of the words and presence of God in the Bible (*Isaiah 55:10,11; Deuteronomy 32:2; Psalm 68:8,9*). Why would rain and water represent words? Because water is for a purpose.

Just as water can destroy or bring life (it can bring death like a flood or refresh and sustain life) so are our words also. *The human tongue can be tamed by no man. It is a restless, undisciplined evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who were made in God's likeness! Out of the same mouth come forth blessing and cursing. These things, my brethren, ought not to be so. Does a fountain send forth from the same opening fresh water and bitter?* (James 3:8-11).

We use water for predominantly two things; to drink (internal) and to cleanse (external). In order to be a pure vessel for Life-giving water, we must be cleansed and purified ourselves. Water in the Bible frequently is for either judgment and testing, or for blessing and refreshing. The Psalms talk about the enemy overwhelming you like a flood (Psalm 32:6; 90:5; 124:2-5) and the prophets speak of the judgment of God being like a flood. In judgment and testing water was used to destroy all flesh

except those whom God saw as righteous (e.g. Noah and his family). This also symbolised baptism, the death to the old creation (1 Peter 3:20,21; 4:1,2).

When we also go through trials and feel as though they will overwhelm us like a torrent of water, it is often because God wants to kill the flesh that yet survives in us, in order to cleanse and purify us. He still brings Life through death! *Jesus stood, and He cried in a loud voice, If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink! He who believes in Me, who trusts and relies on Me, as the Scripture has said, From his innermost being shall flow [continuously] springs and rivers of living water. But He was speaking here of the Spirit Whom those who believed in Him were afterward to receive. (John 7:37-39).* But we won't drink unless we are thirsty. It is only when you are thirsty and you realise that you NEED water that you will then SEEK the Fountain of the water of Life Who alone can quench and satisfy that thirst.

One thing that is guaranteed to make you thirsty is living in a desert without water for a time. Living in the desert is not ideal to say the least! Everything looks the same day in and day out in a desert, there is no joy in life. But God allows those times for a purpose. Only when you have experienced the heat and torture of the waterless desert, will you thirst and desire and long for the breakthrough of springs of Living Water and will fully appreciate the abundance of water and green pastures that God brings you to (*Psalms 107:35-3*).

Only God alone can turn a desert and wilderness into a place of springs and fruitfulness in His time! (Isaiah 35:1,2,5-7; Isaiah 32:1-3). The desert CAN be exactly where God wants us to be. The Bible says that God dwells in Zion, Zion is also where the new Jerusalem is built. The name 'Zion' in Hebrew means: parched place, or dry barren wilderness - God's ways are the opposite of ours; sometimes He wants us in a dry, barren place so He alone becomes the Spring and Fountain of our survival!

**Do not earnestly remember the former things; neither consider the things of old. Behold I am doing a new thing! Now it springs forth; do you not perceive and know it and will you not give heed to it? I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. For I will pour water upon him who is thirsty, and floods upon the dry**

**ground. I will pour My Spirit upon your offspring and My blessing upon your descendants. And they shall spring up among the grass like willows or poplars by the watercourses. *Isaiah 43:18,19; 44:3,4.***



# Being Vindicated

**A man's self shall be filled with the fruit of his mouth; and with the consequence of his words he must be satisfied [whether good or evil]. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they who indulge in it shall eat the fruit of it. Proverbs 18:20,21**

We reap what we sow, there are natural consequences to our words. We can speak words that bring Life or words that bring death. We need to learn to be careful with our words (Matthew 12:36-37). In a dream I was kneeling beside an old family friend who seemed very sick. I looked up and saw a black figure some distance away that looked demonic, I looked at it and opened my mouth to tell it to get lost but when I opened my mouth, instead of words, a gush of water came out and swept the thing clear away! When I awoke the verse 'out of their innermost beings shall flow rivers of living water' came to mind.

At first I was confused as to why 'living' water would bring death, but I believe this illustrates that what is the water of Life to some, is also the water of death to others, as Paul wrote: *"For we are the sweet fragrance of Christ unto God, discernible alike among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing: to the latter it is an aroma from death to death [the smell of doom], to the former it is an aroma from life to life [living and fresh]." 2 Corinthians 2:15,16.* He said this in regard to the anointing of Christ but the same may also apply to our words because when we speak His words on His behalf, they carry His anointing with them - whether for Life or death.

A drastic example of this is with Peter's words: *You have not lied to men but to God. Upon hearing these words, Ananias fell down and died. And great dread and terror took possession of all who heard of it...his wife came in... and Peter said to her....Listen! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out also. And instantly she fell down at his feet and died. Acts 5:5,10*

When Jesus spoke, although His words were full of the Spirit and Life, yet not everyone accepted them and Jesus fully realised this: *It is the*

*Spirit Who gives life; the flesh conveys no benefit whatever. The words (truths) that I have been speaking to you are spirit and life. But still some of you fail to believe and have faith. For Jesus knew from the first who did not believe and had no faith, and who would betray Him and be false to Him. John 6:63,64 Whoever is of God listens to God [Those who belong to God hear the words of God]. This is the reason that you do not listen; because you do not belong to God and are not of God or in harmony with Him. John 8:47*

Often the words which God speaks are not comfortable and yet are necessary (*Proverbs 4:20,22-24*). Words can be used either by God or by the enemy. Our enemy is not called the Accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10) for nothing! The literal Greek for the word 'devil' (diabolos) means to slander or accuse falsely. We typically do a good job of accusing and condemning ourselves without needing much help, particularly if we have a tender heart towards God and fear Him. In order to overcome the Accuser we must ask God to judge us Himself. Our hearts are deceitful and only God knows us through and through. If we are guilty, we must acknowledge it.

Being interested by the meaning of the word 'devil' in the Greek, I also looked up 'satan' to see what it meant and it means adversary and its origin corresponds with an Aramaic word which means "work"! THAT is interesting because the literal Greek for evil is: "full of labour and toil" - which of course is the exact opposite to God's Rest and Peace! So often we can get caught up in trying to DO things ourselves; whether it be defending ourselves, judging ourselves, justifying ourselves etc! Father was showing me several important things about our enemy; he uses false accusations and slander to bring condemnation but it only has any effect IF I am trying to justify or defend myself (works, labour, toil!). My only justification and vindication and defence is Christ and what HE has done!

It doesn't matter what we ourselves or anyone else thinks or says about us. What matters is what GOD thinks about us! We must ask Him what He sees as He alone is our Vindication. We can then hide ourselves in Him, He becomes our refuge and defence and we have no need to say or do anything more! *"But as for me personally it matters very little to me that I should be put on trial by you on this point, and that you or any other human tribunal should investigate and question and cross-question me. I*

*do not even put myself on trial and judge myself. I am not conscious of anything against myself, and I feel blameless; but I am not vindicated and acquitted before God on that account. It is the LORD Himself Who examines and judges me." 1 Corinthians 4:3,4.*

God's vindication is not necessarily proving you to be right to others, but rather proving to YOU that you are right and vindicated in HIS eyes! This brings a form of immunity; of peace, security and triumph over opposition which no person could ever give! *"No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall show to be in the wrong. This peace, righteousness, security and triumph over opposition is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; THIS is the righteousness or the vindication which they obtain from Me, this is that which I impart to them as their justification, says the Lord." Isaiah 54:17.*

If He holds you blameless; then what does it matter what ANY mere person says or thinks? "If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect when it is GOD Who justifies?" We need to learn to go to Him and to ask Him to show us if we have said the right thing instead of just going to others for their opinion. God's opinion is all that counts! If He gives you Peace about what you've said or done, you can be STRONG and stand on that! No man or woman can give that peace, justification and vindication to you; HE is to be your refuge and strength!

*Let my sentence of vindication come from You! May Your eyes behold the things that are just and upright. You have proved my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and find nothing, no evil purpose in me; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. Psalm 17:2,3*

When God has shown you where you stand with Him, you can STAND strong and sure wearing the breastplate of integrity and right standing with God and stand against the Accuser just as Jesus did with the sword of the Spirit which is the WORD of God - "GOD has said..." and "It is written..."!

**For the weapons of our warfare are not physical, but they are**

**mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, inasmuch as we refute arguments and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the true knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ, the Anointed One. 2 Corinthians 10:4,5**

# Being a Fool

It is clear that in terms of the expectations and values of this world we are utter fools. We believe in One who cannot even be seen, for a start! Most of us don't suffer foolishness or fools easily, and yet our message is undoubtedly one of foolishness to this world... (1 Cor. 1:18,27). So we probably need to get used to being thought of as fools!

God deliberately chooses what in this world is insignificant and treated with contempt (1 Cor. 1:28). His is truly a back-to-front Kingdom which so often makes no sense from our human, earthly perspective. One example of this is to give up all our "wisdom" and to be fools: "Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise" (1 Cor. 3:18).

Another example of this "foolishness" is to be a servant. We aren't really familiar with what being a servant means in our Western society today. We live in a culture where being strongly individual, working for yourself and standing up for yourself is admired and encouraged. However, being a servant is the opposite of that, and being a servant is something that is frequently mentioned in the Bible.

Today we are more familiar with being called "workers" or "employees" and while there are some similarities between servants and workers, the essential difference has to be in the attitude of the heart. As workers we may work for someone, and yet not serve them. There is something in us naturally that does not like to be subservient and yet we're called to be servants – not only to God, but to one another also: "Anyone wanting to be the greatest must be the least – the servant of all!" (Mark 9:35).

Some of the characteristics of good servants, even within the last century were:

- Working silently.
- Not giving an opinion.
- Working behind the scenes and usually not seen.
- Never arguing with their master.
- Putting the desires of their master before their own.

- Never talking back or being abusive in their language.
- Knowing their position and place.
- Appreciating the work.
- Loyalty to their master and their master's family.
- Laying down their personal life, family, and time for the master.
- Being dependent on their master for food, accommodation and a living.

Many of these characteristics are also applicable to us in our spiritual and practical every day lives as we serve our Master.

A servant is humble, thoughtful, and always looking to please their master. They do not take over the role of “master” with their fellow servants; that would be unthinkable, for they recognize that we have only one Master/Lord. “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth” (2 Tim. 2:24,25).

While we are the friends and family of God, we are also His servants; all three forms of imagery are true and each reveal certain characteristics:

- as His friends we spend a lot of time with Him and enjoy doing things together;
- as His family we are intimately connected with Him;
- as His servants we willingly and gladly submit ourselves to Him and serve Him, even to the extent of being fools for Him.

Father has been showing me this in a rather unusual way. He is all about redeeming things, even bad things. In this case a couple of years ago a friend referred to me as a “complete ass” and in my friend's defence, this is quite true and is actually a compliment because, of course, an ass was the only animal in the Bible that God actually spoke through!

### **Attributes of Donkeys**

A donkey is a more common word for an ass these days, unless you are being crude and offensive and meaning someone who is a fool. Father showed me that I am, indeed, a donkey (this may not be news to some of my friends!) and yes, He even sometimes speaks through me too!

As is usually the case when Father is teaching me about something, I started to

see things about donkeys everywhere I looked, including people all around the world getting very excited about a children's book from New Zealand called, "The Wonky Donkey", and even a friend who named her own vehicle "Donkey"!

The first thing that usually comes to mind when we think of a donkey, is that they are stubborn, stupid animals. However, I learned that it is due to their *situational awareness and intellect* that they are often incorrectly labelled as being stubborn:

"Donkeys have a notorious reputation for stubbornness, but this has been attributed to a much stronger sense of self-preservation than exhibited by horses. Likely based on a stronger prey instinct and a weaker connection with humans, it is considerably more difficult to force or frighten a donkey into doing something it perceives to be dangerous for whatever reason. Once a person has earned their confidence they can be willing and companionable partners and very dependable in work. Although formal studies of their behaviour and cognition are rather limited, donkeys appear to be quite intelligent, cautious, friendly, playful, and eager to learn."

In Grecian fables donkeys were portrayed as being not only stubborn, but also stupid and very lower class, often contrasted with horses. "Aesop alone wrote around twenty fables about 'donkeys' and they are invariably depicted in a negative light, as servile and lazy, selfish and stupid; used as examples of human folly and weakness... it is largely from such fables that the donkey's reputation for foolishness and stupidity has been encouraged and perpetuated." <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4552212/>

In the sixteenth century Shakespeare made using the word "ass" popular as an insult: "It was Shakespeare especially who encouraged the derogatory use of 'ass': used frequently in his plays to describe stupid or clownish figures. This commonly used insult denoted an ignorant fellow, a perverse fool or a conceited dolt."

In sharp contrast to all this, donkeys in the Bible are symbolic of peace, service, suffering, loyalty, patience and humility. Donkeys have been used as a working animal for at least 5000 years. They are known as a "beast of burden" because they carry burdens for other people. They are mentioned 133 times in the Bible, they were the tractor, truck, and car of the day – donkeys were used for getting

goods and people from one point to another, as well as being used for milling flour, agricultural, and building work.

“In the Ancient World, donkeys were the ubiquitous beast of burden and were vital to the economy. They carried crops and produce, hauled rock and timber, carried provisions and merchandise, transported food and equipment for the army and turned the heavy millstones to produce flour. The great physical strength and endurance of donkeys while requiring little care and food rendered them primary beasts of burden.” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4552212/>

In both Hebrew and English we have a saying: to work like a donkey. This means to do hard work or less interesting work that has to be done; in other words: a servant’s work! Today we know that donkeys are not only strong, they are smart, and while they form very strong bonds with their owners and family, they are very cautious of strangers.

When a horse is frightened by something they will usually rear up and then bolt, but when a donkey is scared they will freeze and then intelligently investigate and assess the situation before proceeding to do anything. They think about their choices before deciding what action to take and this is often misinterpreted by people as stubbornness, because they aren’t doing what the human wants them to do. This has given donkeys the reputation of being stubborn even though donkeys are usually very obedient. If they weren’t obedient animals they would not have been successfully used by humans for thousands of years!

Some of us need to learn from donkeys how to be “stubborn” in the same way that they are: to refuse to compromise and do what others want us to, and instead be discerning and unmoving until our Master moves with us. “I am not trying to please people. I want to please God. Do you think I am trying to please people? If I were doing that, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

Of course the evidence of this attribute of caution in a donkey in the Bible is most clearly seen in the story of Balaam in Numbers 22-24.

### **The Story of an Unprophetable Donkey**

Balaam was a foreteller with a reputation for the things he’d predicted happening, and so he was sought out by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse his enemies for him. The king sent his ambassadors to Balaam with a fee to pay for



his trouble, but there was one big problem: the people the king wanted cursed were God's own people, the Israelites!

You'd think this would have received an immediate "No can do" reaction from Balaam if he was truly God's prophet! But instead he invited the officials to stay the night and said, "I'll deliver the answer that God gives me in the morning."

Not surprisingly, God said to Balaam: "Don't go with them. And don't curse the Israelites—they are a blessed people." So the next day Balaam sent the important officials packing, as he arguably should have done the previous day instead of entertaining them! The king wasn't impressed and sent even more important men, princes this time, telling them to say, "I will honour and reward you lavishly—anything you tell me to do, I'll do; I'll pay anything!"

This time Balaam replied, "Even if Balak gave me his house stuffed with silver and gold, I wouldn't be able to defy the orders of my God to do anything, whether big or little. But come along and stay with me tonight as the others did; I'll see what God will say to me this time." That sounded really good, but should he have entertained them at all? Should he have given their request any time of day when God had *already* spoken to him about this? It seems that he *was* tempted by the offer after all, otherwise he would have immediately dismissed them instead of saying he would ask God again, even though God had already given Balaam His answer.

This time though, God told Balaam to go with them, and it wasn't because God was in agreement with his mission either; He had something else in mind! So Balaam saddled his donkey and headed off with the princes.

The Bible tells us that God was then angry because Balaam went with them. Sometimes, it seems, if we ignore what God tells us at first, it will *appear* as though He has changed His mind when He tells us what *we want to hear*, even when it is NOT His desire for us at all. A servant ought to do what their master tells them to immediately, the first time. And how could Balaam even think that God would want him to go and curse His people in the first place? It looks as though there was something fundamentally wrong with Balaam to begin with. This appears to have been a test for Balaam, a test which he failed.

God took this pretty seriously and sent an angel to kill Balaam while on his journey. Balaam was riding his donkey when the donkey saw the angel on the

road in front of them and turned into a field to avoid it. Balaam was probably rather embarrassed by this and beat his donkey until the donkey was back on track again. But they hadn't gone far when the angel again stood in their way with sword drawn. The donkey veered away, this time crushing Balaam's foot against a wall. Balaam got angry at his donkey and whipped it.

Now, if Balaam had been riding a horse at this point, I suspect he would no longer have been on the horse to be able to whip it, he would instead have been dumped unceremoniously on the ground after the horse reared in fright and ran off! People have been badly hurt and even killed in falls off horses, but to my knowledge, people don't get injured in falls from donkeys.

After another beating of the donkey Balaam headed off again, only to be blocked by the angel on the road, this time in a narrow spot where there was nowhere for the donkey to turn, so the donkey simply stopped dead in its tracks and fell to the ground.

This time Balaam totally lost his temper. It must have been very embarrassing to have these things happening in full view of the princes and his servants! He beat the donkey with a stick. At this point God enabled the donkey to talk. She said, "What have I done to you that you've beaten me three times?"

And, instead of stopping and realising that something very strange and supernatural was happening here, Balaam actually *answered* the donkey! He must have been pretty riled up not to realise that it was not normal for his donkey to talk back to him! Balaam said to his donkey, "You've provoked me and made me look like a fool! If I had a sword I would have killed you by now."

The donkey spoke again to Balaam: "Am I not your trusty donkey on whom you've ridden for years right up until now? Have I ever done anything like this to you before? Have I?"

He admitted that no, she had not. Then God enabled him to see the angel blocking the way and it was Balaam that fell to the ground this time! The angel said to him, "Why have you beaten your poor donkey these three times? I have come here to block your way because you're getting way ahead of yourself, your behavior is willfully contrary. The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she hadn't, I would have killed you by this time, but not the donkey. I would have let her off."

So, the donkey had saved his life three times. Balaam repented and said he'd go home, but God told him to go on ahead, but only to speak the words He gave. And the words He gave Balaam to say were words of blessing over His people! The king was none too happy with this and got Balaam to try to curse them three times.

Interestingly, the final time, the Bible says: "Balaam realized that God wanted to bless Israel. So he didn't work in any sorcery or divination as he had done earlier." Wow! This was a compromising prophet if ever there was one, and yet, sadly, he would be welcomed in many churches today, simply because of his foretelling ability and because he had heard God's voice. Today people would likely think he was a true prophet of God and listen to the man!

Finally King Balak lost his temper with Balaam and they both went their separate ways. In Joshua 13:22 Balaam is recorded as a soothsayer/diviner/false prophet and it states that he was killed by the people of Israel. In 2 Peter 2 he is referred to as "a profiteer and connoisseur of evil" and Jude warns of being sucked into Balaam's error by greed.

Peter sums it up with: "Balaam... fell in love with the money he could make by doing wrong; but Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey spoke to him with a human voice, scolding and rebuking him" (2 Pet. 2:15,16).

### **Learning to be a Servant**

If God wanted to kill Balaam, and sent His angel to do this, then why did He allow a humble donkey to stop Him? It looks like a case of redemption yet again: God turned the cursing the king had wanted to give, into the blessing of His people. Interestingly, in the Jewish religion the donkey is considered an impure animal, even more impure than a pig because it not only has non-split hooves, but also does not chew the cud – the two prerequisites for "kosher" animals. And yet, in spite of that double impurity, it is the only impure animal whose firstborn could be consecrated and redeemed (Ex. 13:13; 34:20). The Talmud suggests that there is something special about the donkey, that it represents the redemption of the Jewish people because the donkey was chosen by them to carry the gold and silver when they escaped from Egypt.

The fact is that God often seems to speak to us through someone or something that would deliberately offend us and that is not "kosher" – whether because of

impurity, immaturity or even stupidity. I think He wants us to get over ourselves and to see the truth about ourselves and He often uses offence to accomplish this! After all, it is hard to offend a humble person, and impossible to offend a dead person.

A donkey is not nearly as impressive or as big as a horse, and yet Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem, not on an impressive, stately white stallion, but on a small, humble, grey donkey. As He so often did, He chose the opposite of what we would choose! Jesus chose to honour this creature who was normally considered so very impure; He was, and still is, all about redemption, restitution, reparation and reclamation! Each of us are living examples of this fact. And each of us also carries Christ where He wants to go; just like this donkey did. Every donkey also bears the sign of a cross physically on its back, and so do we spiritually – we are marked as Christ's ones who take up our cross every day (Luke 9:23).

There's no doubt that a donkey epitomises a servant. While many of us may be workers, not all of us are servants. Workers will get a job done, but a servant is invested with their whole life in loyalty, selflessness and service.

And just in case there is any misunderstanding, by service and serving I am *not* thinking of or talking about “ministries”, or anything to do with a church. I am talking about being devoted to one Master and serving that Master loyally and faithfully no matter what the cost. The closest example I can think of in my own world, is a dedicated mother who loves and serves her children, husband and household day in and day out without monetary recompense. Each of us can work for either God or ourselves in our workplace, whether that be at home, or outside the home – it is primarily a heart issue, and not a physical issue. Many of those who think they are God's servants are very busy going and doing and saying things that He has *never asked them to* – just like Balaam, and that is NOT being a servant at all. That is serving yourself, your ambition, your “mission”, your vision, your church, and your own desires.

“It is almost unbelievable how far we will go to avoid obeying God. We call Jesus “Lord” and beg Him to rejuvenate our souls, but we are careful to do not the things He says. When faced with a sin, a confession or a moral alteration in our life, we find it much easier to pray half a night than to obey God. Intensity of prayer is no criterion of its effectiveness. A man may throw himself on his face and sob out his troubles to the Lord and yet have no intention to obey the commandments of Christ. Strong emotion and tears

may be no more than the outcropping of a vexed spirit, evidence of stubborn resistance to God's known will." – A. W. Tozer, *Sacrifice is No Substitute for Obedience*

Serving other people is not necessarily serving God at all; it can be, but isn't always. Too many people deceive themselves in this area. Remember that even though Balaam had heard God speak to him and was sought out because of this, he abused not only his "gifting" but also his donkey, his faithful working animal/servant. We see this a lot in churches and "ministries" where a leader will use people he/she considers lower than themselves, essentially riding on top of others, and beating them with words to get them to do what they want; and it is not a good thing. It is the way of Balaam whose name means "not of the people; a foreigner".

Jesus mentioned Balaam in a warning to His people in the book of the Revelation: "I have a few complaints against you. Some of you are following the teaching of Balaam. Long ago he told Balak to teach the people of Israel to *eat food that had been offered to idols and to be immoral*" (Rev 2:14). Balaam had revealed to Balak how to deceive and trip up God's people – through compromise.

"In other words, more simply, it amounted to this: there are those there who introduce worldly methods, worldly means and resources, worldly policy into the realm of the things of God and among the people of God. Every one of us is assailed far more subtly than we recognise in this very thing. It is not just a matter of introducing the grosser forms of worldliness, but it is sometimes just a little bit of worldly wisdom, for example, in making decisions, where the thing is not wholly of the Holy Spirit and we use man's standards of values and judgment; where we are sometimes tempted to take a line of less resistance in order to gain some advantage; where we come down from the high place of trusting the Lord for everything in a day of pressure, adversity or trial and do not hold on to the Lord to meet the situation. Instead we are tempted to turn to some expedient way of meeting the situation... expediency, to a little bit of human diplomacy, patronage, stirring of the flesh in order to get through. All that is the spirit of the world and it works in very subtle ways from time to time, and when it has dictated a course or governed a decision, there has come about a state of compromise where the Holy Spirit Himself has to stand back in helplessness and leave us to get on with it and we find ourselves in a state of terrible bondage and spiritual

weakness.” *T. Austin-Sparks, The Recovery of Spiritual Power Chapter 5.*

If God asked you to give up all that you’re doing, give up all your “spiritual” religious activities and simply be alone with Him for even a couple of months, seemingly doing nothing, *would you do it?* Too often the church, religion, and activities associated with churches and religion are the master of people’s hearts instead of Christ Himself. As I’ve said elsewhere, this is idolatry and when the church is an idol, you cannot hear or see Christ clearly because your idol is very effectively blocking your vision and your hearing, just as the Bible tells us (see Psalm 135:15-18).

The Hebrew word for “serve” means to labour and work. So when we say we are serving God we are saying that we are working for HIM; we are not working for other people, or for money, or for recognition, or for any of the things this world expects to be related to work. We are, in a sense, fools for giving up all that this world values! This kind of service gives up what you want, gives up your own life, to live for someone else. In fact, this kind of working is intimately linked with love because it is our joy and our privilege to work and live for our Master, it is truly a “labour of love”! And to love, live and work in this way may seem foolish to some. This is a very fierce, stubborn love, a love that will serve nobody else, not even yourself; instead your life, your purpose, your desire, your reason to live is now entirely found in *this One!*

**Think of us as servants of Christ who have been given the work of explaining God’s mysterious ways (1 Cor. 4:1).**



# Being # Blessed

Being blessed is something that many aspire to and something that many also glory in and even take credit for! When we say that someone is “blessed” we usually mean that they have succeeded in some way, whether that be financially, academically, or physically. Used in this way, the word “blessed” may be one of the most incorrectly used, and therefore abused, words in English.

Think about it, you pass an exam; you consider yourself “blessed”. But what about your brother who sat the same exam, studied harder than you, and did not pass? Is he *not* blessed?

You are given a raise or a bonus at work; you believe you are “blessed”. But what about your sister who cannot even get a job through no fault of her own? Is *she* not blessed?

You’re a star player in a game of sport, you win, you tell reporters you are “blessed”. But what about the new player on the opposing team who just dislocated their shoulder in the game? Is he cursed simply because he was on the opposing team?

You have just extended your mortgage to buy a bigger, more expensive house; you tell friends that you have been “blessed” by God. But what about your neighbour who cannot afford even their weekly rent? Are they not being blessed by God because they struggle financially?

You have beautiful, successful children; others say you are “blessed”. But what about your friends who love children but are not able to conceive? Are they not considered blessed simply because they can’t reproduce?

You have married the one person you love, you are “blessed”. But what about the foreigner in your country who has lost the love of his life in a war in his homeland? Are you going to tell him that he is not “blessed”? Or worse, that he is cursed?

You are “blessed” with no major health problems. But what about the person who is bedridden and yet their relationship with God is far stronger and closer

than yours? Are they not blessed???

Surely this mentality of what blessing means is a *very* superficial, selfish, and shallow perspective; not to mention earthly instead of heavenly!

Consider Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was said to be “blessed more than all other women” – she had to endure the stigma of a pregnancy outside of marriage, be falsely accused, lose her reputation (and probably all her friends), be a stranger in a foreign land with a young baby, and then had to watch her dear son be cruelly tortured and put to death as a criminal for crimes He didn’t commit. That would have been excruciatingly painful for any mother. To us that doesn’t sound like someone who was blessed more than any other woman! As prophesied, a sword pierced her soul – she was cut to the heart (Luke 2:35).

Perhaps we need to adjust our definition of what blessing is to be more in line with what the Bible describes as a blessing. Here is a list of some of the things that the Scriptures tell us are very real blessings:

Knowing you can’t do anything spiritually, having no position or influence, and having no spiritual wealth of intellect or education, is a blessing. “Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless and poor. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.” (Matt. 5:3).

Crying and grieving is a blessing. “Blessed are those who mourn. They will be comforted.” (Matt. 5:4).

Being deferential, submissive and humble is a blessing. “Blessed are those who are gentle. They will inherit the earth. (Matt. 5:5).

Longing for and desiring our Father’s approval instead of all that this world can offer, is a blessing. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God’s approval. They will be satisfied.” (Matt. 5:6).

Being gracious and merciful instead of vindictive, being compassionate and kind instead of intolerant, and being sympathetic instead of indifferent is a blessing. “Blessed are those who show mercy. They will be treated mercifully.” (Matt. 5:7).

To know the heart of God, and to have your thoughts occupied with Him is a blessing. “Blessed are those whose thoughts are pure. They will see God.” (Matt.



5:8).

To be at rest and at peace, to intervene on behalf of those who are bullied, to try and pacify those who are angry or distressed, is to be blessed. “Blessed are those who make peace. They will be called God’s children. (Matt. 5:9).

When others misunderstand and reject you for doing what your Father wants, you are blessed! “Blessed are those who are persecuted for doing what God approves of. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.” (Matt. 5:10).

Being falsely accused, ridiculed, insulted, and criticised is a blessing. “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. So leap for joy—since your heavenly reward is great. For you are being rejected the same way the prophets were before you” (Matt. 5:11-12).

When you are asked by God to leave your comfort zone, to do or say things that are difficult, to endure things that do not seem fair, and when you cannot understand God’s ways – when it doesn’t feel at all like you’re being blessed but messed with and yet you still trust and love Him – then you are really blessed. “Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me” (Matt. 11:6).

When God enables you to see spiritual things with great clarity, when you not only hear but know His voice, then you are *truly* blessed. “Blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear. I can guarantee this truth: Many prophets and many of God’s people longed to see what you see but didn’t see it, to hear what you hear but didn’t hear it.” (Matt. 13:16,17).

You’re blessed when you not only hear or read God’s words, but when they have Life and when you in turn live by them, “Blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice” (Luke 11:28).

When you’re not relying on what you see and hear physically and when the unseen spiritual is more important and real to you than what is physically around you, then you’re blessed: “Blessed are those who haven’t seen Me but believe” (John 20:29).

You are blessed when you are suffering and feel utterly broken, for then you can in turn help others with the comfort and help that you yourself have received. “He comforts us whenever we suffer. That is why whenever other people suffer,

we are able to comfort them by using the same comfort we have received from God” (2 Cor. 1:4).

When you are unappreciated, insulted, rejected, and even excommunicated, you are really blessed, so *be* a blessing in return and speak kind words; not only *about* the person or people involved, but also to them. “Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and He will bless you for it” (1 Pet. 3:9 NLT).

Having to patiently face challenges, difficulties, adversity and trials is a real blessing: “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12).

Being able to react lovingly and graciously from God’s heart instead of your own heart when somebody hurts you, is a blessing: “Now, this is the goal: to live in harmony with one another and demonstrate affectionate love, sympathy, and kindness toward other believers. Let humility describe who you are as you dearly love one another. Never retaliate when someone treats you wrongly, nor insult those who insult you, but instead, respond by speaking a blessing over them—because a blessing is what God promised to give you” (1 Peter 3:8-9).

In Christ we truly *are* blessed, and THAT on its own ought to be blessing enough for any human being! Our Father has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

Clearly God’s view of blessing and ours are quite different – God’s ways are just so often the opposite of our ways, His is the Back to Front Kingdom! We need to learn to view things from His expansive, all-inclusive perspective instead of our own minuscule exclusive perspective. He sees the big picture, we see only a tiny portion.

## **Being Blessed**

Of course it is good to give credit to God for all that He gives – for both the good *and* the bad! We tend to remember the good, but forget that the so-called bad can equally be a true blessing from God – sometimes we need those difficult

things to correct us and to adjust us. It is all about our perspective and attitude because we can easily develop an attitude of entitlement and arrogance in thinking that we are especially important, worthy, and “blessed”, and that we actually deserve to be happy and rich in all things; but God’s blessings are *never* intended to develop such an attitude of pride in a person, that’s for sure. Instead we humbly recognise that whatever comes our way is for a reason. “What are you so puffed up about? What do you have that God hasn’t given you? And if all you have is from God, why act as though you are so great, and as though you have accomplished something on your own?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

Jesus promised His students: “You will be hated by all people because of My name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. The student shares his teacher’s fate. The servant shares his master’s! And since I, the master of the household, have been called ‘Satan,’ how much more will you! But don’t be afraid of those who threaten you. For the time is coming when the truth will be revealed: their secret plots will become public information. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow Me, you are not worthy of being Mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give it up for Me, you will save it.” (Matt. 10:22,24-26,38,39). That does not really sound like the “blessed” life some seem to expect!

The way in which many people use the word “blessed” suggests that they think all it means is to be rich and successful here on earth. Perhaps this verse is applicable in that case: “You claim to be rich and successful and to have everything you need. *But you don’t know how bad off you are.* You are pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. *Buy* your gold from Me. It has been refined in a fire, and it will make you rich. *Buy* white clothes from Me. Wear them and you can cover up your shameful nakedness. *Buy* medicine for your eyes, so that you will be able to see.” (Rev. 3:17-18) All TRUE, real blessings come from above, but we are told to *purchase* these heavenly things, meaning that there is a *cost* involved. So what is used to buy them? The very next verse reveals the answer: “I correct and discipline everyone I love. Take this seriously, and change the way you think and act.” To be rebuked, chastised, humbled and corrected (often through our circumstances) is the price we pay; yet it is a very small price for what is most precious: heavenly gold, clothing, healing, and eyesight!

In our English dictionaries the first definition of “blessed” is: consecrated; sacred; holy; sanctified. The second meaning is: worthy of adoration, reverence, or worship, and the third definition is: divinely or supremely favored; fortunate.

So when you tell people that you are blessed, do you mean that you are sanctified or worthy of adoration and worship? Or do you mean that you are supremely favoured by God? “Blessing” is a religious word in English that many use without even thinking about it, when all that they really mean is “happy”. Whereas a religious person would say “I am so blessed to live in this country”, any other person would say, “I’m so happy we live in this country”.

The word for “bless” in the Greek is “makarios” meaning happy, and the root word “mak” means, interestingly, to extend, to make larger. Certainly that is God’s intention when He blesses us: to *extend His Kingdom and His Life* both in us and through us, but sometimes that extending can be uncomfortable and unpleasant!

In the Old Testament one of the words for “blessing” also means “happy”, such as in this verse: “The one whom God corrects [reproves] is happy [blessed], so do not hate being corrected by [reject/despise the instruction of] the Almighty” (Job 5:14). “Barak” is the other word for blessing in Hebrew and is more common. It means to kneel reverently, to salute, praise. The blessing of God was normally associated with fruitfulness. His words of blessing were, “Be fruitful and multiply” – it is ultimately about Life – and Life in fullness and abundance, fruitfulness and multiplication.

One of the great men of the Bible that is associated with blessing is Abraham. God promised Abraham that He would: “make of you a great nation. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.” (Gen. 12:2). We know the story of Abraham, he was a rich man, but he was missing one thing: an heir – he was not able to “be fruitful and multiply”. Without this promised son, how could he become a great nation? It seemed like it was never going to happen, so he eventually “helped” God himself, with disastrous results that continue to this very day.

But thinking of all that God told Abraham, did Abraham have the blessing or the joy of actually *experiencing and seeing* the fulfillment of God’s words in his lifetime? Did he physically see what God had promised come to pass? NO! He did not see it, and yet he was called “blessed”! This is because he “saw” by faith: “All these people died *still believing what God had promised them*. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.” (Heb. 11:13).

They didn't physically receive what they were promised and yet they are spoken of as being blessed and happy! We are foreigners too, this world is not our home, we are born from above. And this is why what this world thinks of as a blessing here on earth is not always considered a blessing from God's perspective.

Remember that the Israelites who God had freed from slavery in such a miraculous way, then complained about missing the food of Egypt. God eventually gave them what they craved (Numbers 11), they were "blessed" in receiving what they wanted and had asked for, but that blessing was actually the *judgement* of God! "They only cared about pleasing themselves in that desert, provoked God with their insistent demands. He gave them exactly what they asked for – but along with it they got an empty heart." (Ps. 106:13-15). We should be careful what we ask for because sometimes getting what we ask God for is a *curse* and NOT a blessing at all.

It boils down to trust – do we trust our Father to give us exactly what we need? Or do we complain and demand "more"? Are we content with what our Father gives, both the good and the bad? Do we ask Him for the things WE want, or do we spend time asking Him what HE wants?

God is a very generous God who delights to give, like any good Father He loves to see His children happy, but as a good Father He also knows what will be good for us and what will not be. He has *eternity* in mind, and not just this short life! And that explains many of the things about this life that are hard for us to understand and accept.

## **Being a Blessing**

Children learn from their parents, and we, as God's children are always learning our Father's ways. Our Father is a Giver, a very generous giver. He is excessively generous... generous with Himself, with His love, life, mercy, kindness, grace, forgiveness, and so much more. Most of all, He is generous in giving *Himself* away freely... Just as God is generous, so His children are just like Him. I am not thinking so much about generosity in terms of financial or material goods, but in terms of our nature and God's nature – *a generosity of heart and spirit* – who We are, because of Him.

Children tend to be very generous: generous with their affections, generous with their time, and generous in telling you exactly what they are thinking too! However, as we grow up and mature we tend to become less and less generous in those areas and instead we learn to hide our thoughts and feelings, often due to wounds we have received from others. We learn not to be generous with who we are, and especially, not to be generous with our thoughts – often due to having them ignored, mocked, or criticised. The result is many adults who, while they may be generous in other ways, are not generous and open with who they are.

*Hear* what Jesus says: “If someone takes unfair advantage of you, *use the occasion to practice the servant life*. No more tit-for-tat stuff. *Live generously*. Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for *them*! Help and give without expecting a return. You’ll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, *generously and graciously*, even when we’re at our worst” (Luke 6:29-31,35,36 MSG).

That is not our natural way of living. We need to recognise that we are now living a new life, having been born from above, and this means a new way of thinking and being. “*So many of the Lord’s people are only living for what they can get from Him, and they do not trouble about what they can be to Him. He seeks a people who will bring to Him an inheritance. He seeks those who are living unto the Lord’s satisfaction.*” – T. Austin-Sparks.

It can take a lot of work for our Father to coax us out of the comfort zone of “me” and into the sometimes uncomfortable zone of “We” – He in me and I in Him. For many of us, being generous with who we are does *not* come naturally or easily – we would rather be closed and distant, than open and close. We’re told that we are to be open and generous, “I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—*shine*! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up to God, this generous Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

So why can it be hard to open up to others? Because it means we will be vulnerable – we will suffer misunderstandings, suspicions, accusations, rejection and more. And yet in so doing we will find ourselves *blessed*... truly blessed, just as Jesus Himself was blessed by doing what His Father wanted Him to do, even at the cost of His life, which in turn was a blessing to others! We too are

required lay down our lives, “This is how we’ve come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed His life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves” (1 John 3:16).

Recently I was looking at a camellia bush and marvelling at how many flowers were on it. This bush wasn’t in a beautiful garden where it would be appreciated, instead it was at the side of a busy city street, jammed between the pavement and a concrete wall. The only reason I had a good view of it was because we were stopped at traffic lights. The profusion of flowers were covering not only the bush, but also the pavement where expired blossoms lay.

I saw not only the beauty of the bush, but of its Creator. I saw that it was a beautiful illustration of the character and nature of the Giver: generous, exceedingly generous! And yet often His generosity and His blessings go unnoticed in our lives... just like this bush full of flowers beside the road. All the cars were rushing past and were not stopping specially to view this bush. They were not stopping because of the creativity and beauty that was on display, instead they were stopping because they legally *had to*; most were not looking to the side of the road to see the bush, but were looking straight ahead, waiting for the second when they could hit the gas and carry on! And we are often like that with God, we don’t always stop and recognise Him and His work – so much of what we do is because of duty and obligation instead of a response of love, joyfulness and delight in Him.

The camellia bush would undoubtedly have been more suited to a lovely garden, where it could be admired and fully appreciated. If we were in the position of the camellia, we would no doubt complain about our situation and strive to move away from the place we were planted in. And yet there the camellia was, full of flowers, in quite a harsh environment, seemingly with few to admire it, yet bearing beautiful flowers as if it were a most cherished bush in a botanic garden!

I believe this is how our Father wants us to be; to be *givers* by nature, to bear fruit, to flower, to touch others with His Life and Love regardless of the environment and situations we find ourselves planted in, and regardless of whether we are ever seen or appreciated. He intends *everything* in our lives to be a blessing of His LIFE and LOVE and LIGHT, not only to us, but through us to others.

He gives, and gives, and gives, and gives... it is simply His nature. We see His generosity in nature all around us. Flowers and fruit bear far more seeds than will ever germinate. Consider this: the average strawberry has around 200 seeds, in just one year an oak tree will produce 70,000-150,000 acorns while a birch tree produces 15-17 million seeds – in just one year! Plants are absolutely extravagant in their production of seeds. Of course this is with the aim of reproduction: of producing more and more *life*. And it is *exactly* the same with God and us!

“How blessed is the person who does not follow the advice of wicked people, take the path of sinners, or join the company of mockers. Rather, he delights in the teachings of the Lord and reflects on His teachings day and night. He is like a tree planted beside streams – a tree that produces fruit in season and whose leaves do not wither. He succeeds in everything he does” (Psalm 1:1-3). This Fruit, this Seed, is God’s own Son, His very *Life* is planted into our hearts reproducing Himself... but not all hearts/soil will allow that Seed to grow and produce a harvest of even more Life. Some soil/hearts are already full: “this is the one who hears the word, but the worries and distractions of the world and the deceitfulness [the superficial pleasures and delight] of riches choke the word, and it yields no fruit” (Matt. 13:22). Yet He gives... even in spite of often not receiving what is due to Him in return – often He is ignored and receives nothing in return or worse, receives abuse and rejection.

Too many people are takers in relationships. They will be “friends” so long as you serve a purpose in their lives and as long as you do what *they* want you to do. Unfortunately people often treat God in the exact same way – they want Him for what He can give them and they want Him to do exactly what *they* want – they want “blessing” for their own benefit rather than for His.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was blessed because of Who was formed in her, and Who came out of her, and we are exactly the same! It is the Life and Person of Jesus Christ in us and through us that is blessed and is a blessing. True, real blessing is not related to the temporal now, but to the eternal forever!!!

I want to be one of those in whom Father sees a large return of the precious Seed that He has invested in me. Thinking back to what the root word of the Greek word for blessing means – to extend and make larger – surely THE biggest blessing ever in this world, THE way to be extended (in more ways than one!) is to have an intimate, personal friendship with the Creator of this amazing



universe! And that requires us to lay down our lives, to forget about being “blessed” ourselves, and to instead BE a blessing to Him – to look not for prosperity, success or reward physically here on this earth, but to look onward and forward to the heavenly eternal outcome of Christ in us, the Hope of Glory!

**How blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they have the right to eat from the Tree of Life and go through the gates into the City! Rev. 22:14**



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