

Unveiling... Portraits of Life

Does it sound like we're
our credentials... asserting
do we need letters of endorse-
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sell it to us in the face, as
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4.6 Christ himself for God, are our letter of
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

7-8 The Government of Death, its constitution chiseled on stone tablets, was
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 brighter
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 impressed

9-11 With that kind of hope to excite us, nothing holds us back. Unlike
look downright dull alongside this new one. If that makeshift government
impressed us, how much more this brightly shining government impressed
for eternity?

12-15 Moses, we have nothing to hide. Everything is out in the open with us. We
wore a veil so the children of Israel wouldn't notice that then and they don't
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 read
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.

16-18 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... Portraits of Life

by Lynette Woods



Other titles:

Unveiling... Vignettes of Life
Unveiling... Lessons from Life
Unveiling... Being Full of Life
Unveiling... Life, But Not As We've Known It

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Contents

[The Little Stone](#)
[The Little Trowel](#)
[The Little Photograph](#)
[Discerning the Body](#)
[Knowing Christ](#)
[A Simulator Ride... but not as we've known it](#)
[Seeing the Son](#)
[Going With the Wind](#)
[Planting and Harvest](#)
[Harvest... but not as we've known it](#)
[Idolatry... but not as we've known it](#)
[Being Like Little Children](#)
[Being Glass Bottles](#)
[Being Soldiers](#)



The Little Stone

There was once a family of stones living together at the side of a path which was beside a riverbed. They were quite content and satisfied with their lot in life, they enjoyed both the sunshine and the rain. They were happy to be in close proximity to one another on the ground where they were frequently trodden on (which, of course, was an accepted and expected part of their daily life).

One day a man came and looked very closely at them and took several stones away with him. The man took the stones to his workshop and very carefully examined each one. One of these stones was separated from the rest. This little stone felt quite bereft and alone and did not understand what was happening to it. The man eventually placed the stone into a device where it was tightly held in place and couldn't have moved itself even if it had been able to.

Wondering why it had been singled out for such treatment, the stone's dismay turned to horror as the man (who people called "the Jeweller") began to use a very sharp, transparent little stone to cut away its strong outer shell. What was wrong with him as he was? He had been nicely rounded and had been very good at absorbing the sun's rays and radiating heat and warmth, but this man was cutting all that outer layer away from him and it was very painful! Eventually the stone was reduced to less than half of its original weight and size. But the work just seemed to go on and on.... The Jeweller slowly worked on the little stone day after day with painstaking accuracy and perseverance, slowly cutting and shaping a diamond by using other diamonds.

Eventually the day came when the diamond was removed from the lathe. But its new found freedom was short-lived. Now it was placed into a holder on a turn-table that spun round and round. This time it was not cutting that the Jeweller was doing, but painful grinding and polishing using the diamond's dust mixed with oil.

Finally, after months of work, the Jeweller had prepared the small stone for what he intended to use it for and, as he prepared to go home for the

night, he put the jewel into his pocket where he thought it would be safe. He was very happy with the clarity and fire in this diamond which was worth all of his effort with it. But as the Jeweller walked home, the movement of the diamond made a small hole in the fabric of his pocket and eventually the little diamond fell through the hole and onto the ground beside a group of stones at the edge of the path.

The sun immediately reflected and shone out of the diamond which had not been in the sun at all since it had been shaped and cut. Now it felt quite different as it saw the sun in a way in which it had never seen it before. It used to absorb and take all the warmth the sun could give it, but now without even realizing it the diamond was spontaneously reflecting and shining out the brilliance of the sun's rays from within itself. The stones on the ground had never before seen anything like this thing, it was quite painful to look at because of how the sun's rays radiated from it.

"What are you?" asked one of the smaller stones.

"I am a stone, just like you." replied the diamond who had not seen the transformation that had taken place since the Jeweller had been working on him.

"No you're not!" the stone was quick to reply, "You are quite different to us, you are very small and are a completely different color and shape to all of us! And what's more I can even see through you; you're definitely not a stone..."

"Oh, but I am indeed a stone, a man called 'the Jeweller' has been working on me and has cut and shaped me into what you see before you" answered the diamond.

The stone thought about this and then asked, "Why would a man do that? They just step on us all the time!"

"I don't know why the Jeweller chose me and decided to cut into me like this. And although it was very painful and difficult, I now feel quite different than I used to... I feel much lighter and somehow much brighter..."

"Why ARE you so very bright?" the stone wondered.

"I'm not entirely sure..." said the diamond who didn't yet understand what it had been changed into, "Perhaps it is because all of my outer layer has been cut away and that enables the Sun to be reflected from me."

"Hah!" retorted another stone, "He thinks the sun shines out of him! So how did you get here then?"

"I fell out of the Jeweller's pocket..." the diamond mumbled, perceiving that his story was neither understood nor believed.

The stones thought this was all very strange! They could see no use at all for such a thing on the ground where they lived. Just think what would happen if one of the men came along barefoot and stood on this bright object when its apex was pointing upwards! It could be positively dangerous. They took pride in the fact that they were not like this strange thing was, they were much bigger and nicely rounded, but this "thing" was little, cold, hard and had many extreme and sharp edges. Whereas they had a smooth, dark exterior which could not be penetrated, this thing was as clear as a raindrop - now what could be the purpose of that in any stone?! It would not be able to take in the sun's rays as they did. When the sun shone upon the stones they quickly absorbed all its warmth and were each nice and warm exactly as they should be - they argued among themselves - feeling very proud of their humble role in the world. But THIS so-called stone didn't absorb the sun at all, it simply took the sun's rays in only to send them straight back out again; it reflected the sunlight which made it terribly bright and painful to look at for too long. Surely the man hadn't lost it but had thrown it away.

Soon the sun went down and the stones around the diamond became very cold in more ways than one. They began to question the integrity of this foreign object, surely this was a fantastic tale and it could not ever have been an ordinary stone, it was simply trying to fit in with them - undoubtedly with dubious intentions. The diamond, realizing that they would never understand unless they had experienced the cutting and shaping for themselves, remained silent and refused to be drawn into any arguments about the validity of its story.

The small diamond wondered if this was to be his life from now on - living as an alien and stranger to the stones around him that he had once been like and where he had once belonged. The stones clearly didn't understand him and weren't about to accept him even though he was made of the same substance as them. And he agreed with all that the stones had said about him; it was true that he was now no good at just absorbing the sun's rays and was painful to look at, that he was smaller than ever before, and that he had many extreme and sharp edges to him. He did feel lighter and brighter though. Before the Jeweller had worked on him, the sun used to affect only his surface and had never penetrated to deep inside, as it did now. He could also see so much more now than he had ever seen before - he had never truly seen the sun until that outer layer had been cut away.

This was all the result of the Jeweller's work on him. WHY had the Jeweller made him to be so different; what purpose was there in it all? Did the Jeweller even know that the diamond had fallen from his pocket and would he come searching for it? The little diamond wasn't sure, after all, he was just an ordinary little stone; and of what use was he to the Jeweller? Some of the other stones that the Jeweller had selected along with him had long ago been cut and then used as parts of tools in his workshop. They had a very important and useful function - although of course what, where and when they were used to cut and shape had nothing to do with the stones themselves; they were simply tools in the hands of the Jeweller. But this little stone... well, he just seemed to need far more work than any other stone and wasn't being used for anything obvious... except perhaps for keeping the Jeweller busy! Maybe that was all he had been needed for and he had now fulfilled his purpose and been thrown away after all...

When the sun rose the next day, the stones again complained about the brilliance of the sun that was shining out from the diamond; they could hardly see the diamond itself because of the brightness of the sun's rays shining out of it. But soon their complaining ceased for the Jeweller had quickly realized his loss and had returned, scouring the sides of the pathway, looking for this one precious little stone. It was easily found because of the brightness of the new day's sun reflecting from it and he was overjoyed to recover his valuable treasure and said "At last, I've found you, my precious diamond!" The stones mumbled about how

worthless the thing had been and thought the man was very strange to have come back looking for it at all.



The diamond was surprised to see how happy the Jeweller was to have found him again and that he had called him a 'diamond'. He hadn't realized how precious and valuable the Jeweller had considered him to be. This made all the agonizing, painful work worthwhile - to be something which brought such joy and delight to this one person who had worked so long and hard with him day after day.

He was now very thankful to be removed from the stones and earth which had once been home to him. It was not his home any longer. No longer was his place on the ground where he could expect to be frequently trodden on without a thought, instead he was now elevated to a place he had not known existed - a place of value in the eyes of the Jeweller because of the work he had personally done on the stone and what he had created with it. The little stone's home was now with the Jeweller.

When the Jeweller got to his workshop, he immediately set to work. He carefully and tenderly cleansed the diamond from the dust and grime of the earth. Neither the fall nor the stones had been able to damage the diamond; it was very hard. When he was finished he took a piece of jewellery that was already set with some other diamonds and had a place remaining for one final diamond. Gently he placed the purpose-made diamond into the setting and carefully made sure that it was firmly in place and could not fall out or be moved from its setting.

The little diamond could not believe that it had been placed in such a

valuable place alongside of others who were so similar to him and who had all experienced the cutting and shaping at the hand of the Jeweller. There was no need to explain to them who or what he was; they knew because they were the Jeweller's jewels also. THIS was where he belonged - right where the Jeweller had so carefully placed him!

While the diamond could see no practical purpose for he and the other diamonds in this item of jewellery when compared with the diamond tools that the Jeweller needed and so frequently used, he also realized - with deep reverence - that the Jeweller had worked harder and longer on him because of the plans he'd had of placing him exactly here. These diamonds had a use and a purpose just as much as the obviously needed and useful diamonds of the tools. The diamond knew it was a great honour to have been chosen and shaped for this piece of jewellery simply to bring pleasure to their creator even if they did not appear to be doing anything useful apart from looking nice and reflecting the Light. They realized, with delight, that THIS was what the Jeweller had intended - to create something through which he could display and view his own handiwork and skill.

Throughout their life together the jewels were often tenderly wiped and kept clean by the Jeweller. He had created his jewels to reflect and radiate the Light and bring him delight and happiness as fine examples of his own creation. Frequently the Jeweller put these precious jewels away from sight for long periods of time in a soft, dark place along with his other jewellery for safe-keeping. Other times he displayed them or wore them. Occasionally the Jeweller was criticized by people for displaying and showing his jewels; and other times, when they were in their secret place, he was criticized for wasting such wonderful jewels by keeping them hidden away! The people did not seem to understand or respect the Jeweller's right to do what he wanted with what was his own.

The diamonds didn't care whether they were seen or not seen by the people because their joy was simply to be wherever the Jeweller wanted them to be and so bring credit and honour to their Designer and Creator. Only the jewels who had been through the long and painful cutting, grinding and polishing knew of the skillful Jeweller's loving but unrelenting hands. They knew without a doubt that they were nothing but ordinary stones except for him and his work and so they would not take

one ounce of credit for their Maker's work.

When the Jeweller chose to wear or display them, the diamonds were frequently admired and looked at with great appreciation. The little stone couldn't understand why some of the people who looked at them remarked on their clarity, beauty and exquisite cut as though the diamonds themselves were somehow responsible for it. He realized that he was not responsible for the criticism and misunderstanding of the stones by the pathway any more than he was responsible for the compliments and recognition from the people - all belonged to the Jeweller. HE had made these jewels. And He had made them to be seen, and in admiring them, the people were inadvertently recognizing the work of the Jeweller. And if the jewels were criticized, the Jeweller was the one being inadvertently criticized.

However, the diamonds often felt grieved that their Jeweller did not receive more recognition and credit for his untiring work of love on each of them for they loved him and owed him everything - this new life would not have come into existence for them if it were not for him. Yet the people hardly ever stopped to think or remark on the skill of their Maker who had so carefully chosen, cut and made each little stone into the diamonds they could see. People tended to focus only on what they could see - they were more interested in looking at the creation than getting to know or see the Creator. The diamonds all knew that they were only ordinary little stones who had been chosen and shaped by an extraordinary Man; they were nothing except for what their Jeweller had done. And yet their Jeweller seemed to get very little, if any, recognition and credit for his invaluable work: that of making living stones.

"Then those who feared the Lord talked often one to another; and the Lord listened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who revered and worshipfully feared the Lord and who thought on His name. And they shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, in that day when I publicly recognize and openly declare them to be My jewels, My peculiar treasure." Malachi

3:16,17



The Little Trowel

Summer was coming to an end.
It was time to do some work in the garden.
Plants that had completed their lifecycle were due to be pulled out and
replaced with fresh new ones.
It was time to get out the little trowel...

The little red-handled trowel was put to work.
Although it was not big like a spade or shovel, it too could move
unwanted earth.
Due to its shape and size it was capable of being very precise.
It was designed for a purpose...

It removed earth from a terracotta pot, making space for a new plant.
It dug deep, loosening the soil so that new roots could easily grow in the
broken-up earth.
When it had completed its task, it was laid aside while the new plant was
inserted into the pot.
Then the back of the trowel was used to pat down the soil firmly around
the plant.

The job was done!

Thanks to the trowel's work, the new plant could grow and thrive where it
had been planted.
The gardener surveyed the finished product and was very pleased!



During the summer months we visited friends who live in the south of the
USA.

In one of our conversations this friend mentioned the trowels that God
uses.

I thought that was a strange thing to say so questioned him on what he
meant.

It turned out that he had actually been saying "trials" but to my ear his
southern accent had sounded like "trowels"!

Yet perhaps I did hear "correctly" after all - our trials ARE like trowels in
our Gardener's hands.

Trials in our lives do go deep and loosen the hardened earth.

They are precise in what they dig out.

They dig deep.

They scoop out the unnecessary earthly stuff in us.

They make room for new Life in M.E. (My Earth).

May the trials and trowels of God do their full and complete work in you
and in me in all the seasons of our lives!

**Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests (trials) and challenges
come at you from all sides.**

**You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open
and shows its true colors.**

So don't try to get out of anything prematurely.

**Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not
deficient in any way.**

James 1:2-4 TM



The Little Photograph

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. 1 Cor 13:12

A housewife was in her home doing the ironing one day while her children played happily close by.

As she looked up from her somewhat boring task, her eye was caught by a small black and white photograph that her Great Uncle had taken many years ago which was sitting on a shelf in the room.

The photograph had been in her home for several years although she had never taken a good close look at it.

As she carried on with the task at hand, she felt the prompting of the One she loved saying to go and have a closer look at the photo; He wanted to show her something. She paused for a moment and looked again at the photograph from where she was:



She could see from this distance that it was a photograph of a fast-flowing waterfall and she wondered what her Teacher was going to teach her about water this time... He had already taught her some things about living water and waterfalls because "little refreshing waterfall" was the meaning of her name.

As she proceeded to finish ironing her husband's shirt, she continued to contemplate the photo of the waterfall from a distance, musing about what her Friend might be going to teach her, because what He said and showed her was always significant. Perhaps He was wanting to teach her

something about the place where the photograph had been taken? Perhaps her Great Uncle had written the name of the site of the waterfall on the back of the photograph?

Eventually she finished the shirt, put the iron down and went over to the little photograph to take a closer look.

As she got closer she was at first puzzled and then very surprised! The photograph was not what she had thought it to be at all! Her Great Uncle had been good at trick photography but this had not been one of those photographs; no, this had been HER incorrect perception of what the photograph was of based upon what she had thought she could see from where she had been standing and the distance she had been viewing the photograph from...

Her eyes had played a trick on her - the photograph was not of a waterfall at all! There WAS some water in the photograph but not quite in the quantity she'd expected - there was just a puddle of it in the foreground. And the water was certainly not the focal point of the picture as she had previously thought! She now saw that the photograph was of an old dirt road which went through a small tunnel to a valley and hills beyond which could just be seen:



Now she saw not only what the photograph was of, but began to see

what her Teacher was wanting her to see. She had frequently been misunderstood and misjudged, primarily over the Internet (as many people often are), and she knew that she too had been guilty of doing the same thing herself.

Now she could see that no matter how familiar she was with a person, and no matter how long she had known them or how well she might think she knew them and what they were all about, what she had seen and known was still like just an image or photo - just a glimpse of a much greater reality. And that reality could not be seen clearly or correctly from a distance or from a black and white photograph! She realized that she was guilty of misjudging and criticizing "photographs" based upon what little could be seen from her perspective and from a distance.

Her opinions and thoughts were simply that - hers! They were based upon what she thought she could see and were not necessarily correct or true. If she shared them, she might also taint others perceptions of what a photograph was of - hindering them from seeing the true picture themselves. Yet even when she was close to this little photograph and did see what it was a photo of, it still was but a small and incomplete glimpse of the real scene...

The photograph was in plain black and white - just like the text that had frequently been used to misjudge her and others. The only way to really know what this place was about was not to see the black and white photograph or even a colour photo of the scene - that would simply add further information, particularly if the photo was still being viewed from a distance. It was also not in having more photographs of the scene given to her, although that would certainly help to give a truer picture. The answer was not even in viewing a video taken of the scene, although again that would help, but it would simply be a representation and mere images with more information of what the reality actually was. How often she had judged people based upon seeing and hearing the living, moving pictures of them! The only way she could ever truly understand what any photograph was about was to be taken by the only One Who knew Truth and to be actually placed in the scene herself.

If she were really standing there she could step into the puddle and feel the water, smell the smells of the bush and hear the birds and insects,

and see completely around her. She would not only be able to see all around but would experience it through all her senses. She could walk along the road and actually stand in the gap and look or walk through into the scene which was beyond that which she could currently see in the photo... She would also see and know that there was definitely NO waterfall there! If she were standing in this scene herself at the very site where the photograph had been taken, it would seem preposterous and quite funny to think that anyone would think or say that the gap was a waterfall; no matter how much someone might insist that it was, based upon what they believed they had seen in black and white on a piece of paper! No, instead the reality of dimension, colour, depth, sensory perception and experience would all combine to give the true picture. A picture may be worth a thousand words but the reality of being in the actual PLACE of the picture is worth more than a thousand pictures...

Now her Teacher made the application even more personal. He showed her that we often misjudge Him in exactly this same way. Many of us view Him from a distance and think we know exactly what He is all about because we are familiar with Him through the black and white text He has given. But because of our distance from Him and our tainted perceptions (often from what others have seen and told us), He may still be completely misunderstood and misinterpreted by us. We still don't necessarily know Who He is, we may simply think we know; based upon our very limited perception and interpretation of what we believe we have seen in black and white on paper.

Even when we are close to Christ and do have Him in focus and believe we have seen Him clearly, we may still be limited by our view. It is true that we can now see clearer than we ever could before, we may see things quite differently now - things are in focus and we can see lots of detail - but are we happy and satisfied to simply see Him in one dimension in black and white? Of course it is good to have photographs of people we know to remind us of them, but it is only a representation of the real person from one brief second in time eternal. Are we content with simply a static image and perception of Him being kept on a shelf in our house? Or do we desire and long to be in the reality and dynamics of being *with* Him and actually experiencing Who He is; of living in Him and being where He is and sharing Life with Him every moment of our lives on this earth and throughout eternity?

We usually don't mind too much if a person we don't know very well misjudges and misunderstands us, but we do mind when it is someone we know and love... and it is exactly the same with Christ. He IS Love, Life and Reality. He longs for us to truly see and know Him and to desire to know, discover and understand more of Who He is. He wants us to know Him from our heart and not our head; to lay aside all our opinions, perceptions and ideas and to know Him in truth. Seeing with our eyes and hearing with our ears will have an impact, but what we see and hear will still be filtered through our own mindsets and as a result will sometimes be misunderstood or misinterpreted by us. Knowing Him from the heart is what He desires and nobody else can know Him in that way for us. No amount of black and white information can ever bring that personal relationship into being; it requires a reality and depth of relationship which can only come through personally knowing Him.

Most of us would not openly share the intimate details of our lives and who we are with someone we had just met or didn't know well, there must first be a development of relationship before there is any revelation of the person. In the same way Jesus Christ will not begin to reveal the depths and mysteries of Who He is unless there is a developing relationship of love, trust, faithfulness and friendship with us. Similarly a father will not share the depths of his heart and experience with his children while they are still young, instead he waits for them to be mature enough to understand and share his heart. At the end of the day it doesn't matter what other people's misconceptions of us are or whether they see the true picture and really know us or not; there is only One Who will ever truly know us and it matters a great deal whether or not we truly know Him.

The photograph shows that there is a Path, a Way, a Break-through in this Rock into scenes and places as yet unknown by us! And the only way of ever knowing what is beyond our little, limited, black and white photographic image of who we think Christ is, is to allow the Photographer to take us to the Place Himself and to lead us into the reality of all that He and His creation are all about! THEN we will begin to truly see and know and experience all that He is and together we will both be satisfied as we see, hear, smell, feel, and walk in true companionship on the Journey together with and in Him...



From where then does Wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living, and knowledge of it is withheld from the birds of the heavens... God understands the Way and He knows the place of it. For He looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. Job 28:20,21,23,24

Additional note added 15 January 2005

I was reminded of this article as I was driving past the airport today because I saw a new sign that said:



This reminded me once again of how vital and important the Person of Christ is - no one remembers the first time they held a photograph because there was no Life in it! There is no comparison between just holding a photo of a baby and holding the baby itself. LIFE is what is vital. The grandfather in the picture above could not convey his love to a photograph of his grandchild, the theme for Air NZ is "being there is everything". May we be those who are not satisfied with mere photographs/pictures of God and who settle for nothing less than knowing His Son and His Love in real Life; that we might pay the price and *"count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege and overwhelming preciousness of KNOWING Christ Jesus my Lord and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him..."* (Phil. 3:8).



Discerning the Body

"For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ." 1 Cor 2:11-16 NKJV.

Recently I heard a bird singing clearly and beautifully and I thought to myself, "That's real pretty, but it's just a bird on a game that my son's playing on the computer" - I discerned the sound, made a judgment about it based on my knowledge of what was happening around me (and previous experience, having already heard birds on the game previously) and so thought I had correctly discerned what was the source of the sound. Then I immediately heard the Holy Spirit tell me to stop what I was doing and look outside; I looked out and SAW and heard the bird singing in the trees! I immediately realized what I had done and told Him I was sorry for my wrong judgment and for attributing something He had created, to a machine! It was effectively robbing Him of the glory due to Him.

He had been teaching me about judging and discerning and in this instance the lesson was that even though I may know what a real, genuine bird sounds like and can discern between a toy bird and a real one, I can still very easily be deceived and wrong in my judgment because of the circumstances around me, my previous experience, how close to the real thing the counterfeit is, and my lack of seeking to know

the source. The bird song on the computer game sounds exactly like the real thing, but it is not. Its source is a machine and not something which is full of Life! It is the source that needs to be discerned.

The counterfeit of discernment is not a lack of discernment, but false, fleshly, natural discernment. We tend to think that spiritual discernment is about what we see that is wrong or right in someone or something. But of course just about anyone can do that - many people who do not know Christ are discerning and perceptive because it is a natural fruit of our own knowledge of good and evil rather than God's Knowledge of good and evil. But it takes the heavenly, supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit to discern CHRIST and His Life and to have His Knowledge!

Many of us have been brought up to believe that to judge is wrong but to discern is alright; judgment is negative, discernment is positive. Somehow discerning and perceiving sounds much better (and more 'spiritual') to us than 'judging'. However, our English dictionaries define discernment as judgment and judgment as "discernment - making critical distinctions to achieve a balanced viewpoint".

So I went to see what the original Greek words used in the Bible meant.

Judging or Discerning?

The words which are translated as BOTH judging and discerning are from the one root Greek word "krino" which means "to judge, be of opinion, examine, choose, separate, discriminate". The word interpreted as discerning, is either "anakrino" or "diakrino" and means "by or through judging". For example, it occurs three times in the verses above: "*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (anakrino - judged). But he who is spiritual judges (same word, anakrino) all things, yet he himself is rightly judged (anakrino) by no one.*"

Whether we like it or not, discerning and judging seem to be synonymous in the Bible, and it has a lot to say about judging, both in a positive and negative context. We usually make our judgments based upon what WE think we see and perceive, but what we often don't realise is that what we are hearing and seeing may be simply based upon what WE know (OUR

knowledge!) which is just the fruit of our natural minds and reasoning (right and wrong, black and white). It may simply be the fruit of our own self-righteousness - believing that Self is right!

From this root word "krino", which means to judge and examine, comes another two related Greek words, "krites" and "krisis". "Krites" means a Judge and is where we get our English word "critical" from, and "krisis" means judgment and separation and is where our word "crisis" is derived from. So our 'discernment' may not only be our fleshly judgments in a religious disguise, but may simply be criticisms which may result in crises when given.

One of our enemy's prime purposes is to bring division and separation (crisis) not only between God and man, but also between God's children who are one IN Christ and what better way than to cause suspicion and doubt, like in the garden of Eden? He can get us caught into a cycle of analyzing one another and reasoning our position and what WE think to be true from our viewpoint and so distract us from where our one aim and focus should be. Our position and viewpoint moves from being justified and one in Christ in the heavenlies, to being individuals trying to justify ourselves and our position here ON EARTH!

Sometimes division occurs between God's children who may both be right in much of what they are saying; but how can this be if they are both speaking truth? Even if our judgments or discernments have truth in them, that truth can still be used for evil when it is not based on or sourced from God's Life. Truth used in the wrong way is far more deceptive and potentially damaging to both us and others because we can get caught up in our zeal for that truth and not be able to see past it; so we lose sight of He Who is our Truth AND Life. Truth that is not given in conjunction with the Way and Life of Christ, brings death and separation - crises.

When we judge one another based upon our knowledge rather than from God's Knowledge, we are likely to be unintentionally and incorrectly judging God and His work, just as I did with the bird's song. For example, we may see someone who is strong and unshakeable. We might decide (based on our "knowledge"!) that they are proud, stubborn, arrogant and unteachable. But we might be completely wrong, what we may not see is

that this strength is the result of the work of Christ which has been worked into a person's life through much weakness, humbling and brokenness - it is HIS Strength which we have mistaken as being natural strength. In judging our brother or sister we may not have discerned the *Source* of their strength and so incorrectly "discerned" and made a judgment based upon our very limited knowledge and understanding. We may in fact be judging the fruit and work of the Tree of Life in other people's lives.

Who are we to criticize and judge God and His work in someone? Only God knows a person's heart... The other side of that is that we might know someone who is quiet-spoken and gentle. We may think that they are truly meek, humble, and a real man or woman of God. But again we may be completely wrong because we may not see that these are natural characteristics and that in secret the person is very proud of their so-called humility! In this case we attribute something that is earthly to God. We just cannot trust ourselves; if the source of our judgment is from OUR knowledge of good and evil, then it is highly suspect; if the source of judgment is from Christ and His Knowledge of good and evil, then it is totally trustworthy!

Knowing and discerning good and evil is obviously important and necessary but the Source of that knowledge must not be natural but supernatural; not from us, but from Christ and His Life within us. This is part of maturing and knowing His Voice and His Mind and discriminating or judging between what is carnal and what is of God in me. Knowing and judging between what is earthly (from me) and what is heavenly (from God) is the discernment that is essential.

Having knowledge makes us like God in thinking that WE know what is right and wrong and so we do not need God and His right judgment and discernment; we can rely upon our own knowledge and be quite proud of being "right". Anything which has no need of God and His Life, is death. Depending upon Christ as the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge gives us the correct and God-given knowledge of good and evil. Knowing that we would in all probability come to the wrong conclusions without Him and His knowledge, will keep us humble and dependent upon Him.

Our Criteria

God's righteous judgment through us is not based upon what we naturally perceive, see and hear at all but upon HIM as the Source of all true hearing and seeing. We see, hear and know NOTHING until and unless He shows us. Apart from Him, we are blind, deaf and dumb - dumb in the sense of being stupid - unfortunately we are not usually dumb in the sense of being silent but instead regularly and readily give our wrong judgments and criticisms for others to hear and suffer from... This does not bring Life and health to the Body; it may well be the reason why many are weak, sick, and asleep or dead spiritually (1 Cor. 11:31).

The whole deception of Satan was to get Adam and Eve to rely upon THEIR own perception and discernment of good and bad rather than simply relying on God's Life and Knowledge. We must know and discern LIFE! His Life must be discerned, His Life is what is vital! We typically misjudge by instead judging from our knowledge of good and evil - thus we make our judgments and decisions based upon criteria which WE believe to be either good or evil and we may be completely right or completely wrong! No person really knows themselves let alone knowing somebody else; the heart is deceitful and guess who we deceive most often? Ourselves! It is only as God continues to shine His Light on us exposing the pride, flesh and evil in us that we begin to truly see ourselves and truly repent. Then we will be less likely to self-righteously point the finger at another human being. Judgment must always begin within our house of God, in this temple of God - me.

Our discernment and judging of people is usually based on what we think we see or do not see about them. If we are looking at others in order to judge good and evil, we may miss seeing the One Thing that is vital - Christ and His Life. Paul said to let every person examine and test themselves because anyone eating and drinking Christ's Blood and Body unworthily, eats and drinks judgment upon himself, having not JUDGED or DISCERNED THE BODY, which is why many are weak, sick and asleep, for if we judged ourselves, we should not be judged (1 Cor 11:28-32). How do we 'judge the Body'? Surely the most basic, important thing to know about a body is whether it is alive or dead, healthy or sick; whether there is death or Life in operation. It is about judging and discerning to see whether Christ's abundant, energizing Life is there and if He is there, then we will rejoice and be united in Him as the One Thing which is vital and necessary! Nothing else really matters, HE is All!

Jesus Himself did not make judgments on His own according to what He could see naturally, He was under the control and direction of His Father. "You judge according to the flesh, by what you see. I judge no MAN. Yet even if I DO judge, My judgment is true, for I am not alone in making it, but I AND the Father Who sent Me." (John 8:15,16). He was not contradicting Himself. His judgment judges the unseen spirit rather than the visible man and His judgment through His Body today will still do the same. Whose spirit do we sense, man's or God's? This makes all other judgments seem rather unnecessary because judging the spirit and source is the bottom line. It ought to give us the fear of God in the judgments and "discernments" which we so readily make.

If we discern Christ and His Life flowing through a person, then surely that is what is most important; not the many things we perceive to be wrong with them. His ways of dealing with us and exposing our flesh are perfect and right for us, and how He deals with us will often not be how He will deal with someone else. All each of us needs is to hear and see Him for ourselves, to have Him and His Life working and living within us and He will perfect and complete all the work which He has begun in us. When we are living in Him and He in us then He WILL do the work of adjustment, teaching and correcting which is so necessary in our lives; either directly or through using other people and circumstances.

Discerning

How do we discern a body in the physical? We see, hear, touch and sometimes smell and it is exactly the same in the spiritual. If we see no life, hear nothing, smell death and touch something cold and lifeless, we know that we have discerned death in a body. Conversely if we see Life, hear Life, smell Life (Anointing), and touch Life, then we know that we have discerned Life in the body!

However, we cannot correctly "discern the Body" if we do not know Christ; He is our one Standard. It is HIM and HIS BODY and His LIFE which we are looking for in one another and we will not recognize His Life if we do not know Him intimately! It is like standing at an airport waiting to meet a family arriving... if you know the family you are meeting, then you are looking with anticipation for them and you do not need anyone to point them out to you, you will instantly know them! You wouldn't analyze

each one when you saw them and suspiciously hold them at arm's length trying to work out whether or not they really ARE the people you are looking for before embracing them; you simply know spontaneously and naturally who they are because you immediately recognize them, you have spent quality time with them; you *know* them! You know their character, their strengths and weaknesses, and their unique giftings and abilities. You 'discern the body'. But if you do not know the family, then you may have to stand there with a sign with their name written on it, or perhaps have a list of physical characteristics to look out for because you will not recognize or discern them correctly otherwise. Even if you have spoken to them on the phone and recognize their voices, you still will not be able to recognize them in a crowd if you have never seen them before, because you have not yet actually SEEN and BEEN with them. (Acts 4:13b).

In the natural, physical world we use our senses of touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing to discern and make judgments about things all the time. The same is true in the spiritual. It is when our spiritual senses are exercised and used that we learn to judge and discern Christ and His Life correctly. Going back to the original picture of the bird singing, often we hear birds singing outside but we don't always hear or take any notice because we are occupied with something else, or we may be used to hearing it, or we are too busy with our own thoughts and so do not hear or appreciate the song. God is always wanting to communicate with us, but we may miss hearing Him for the same reasons. And simply hearing was not enough for me to correctly discern the source of the song, I had to SEE the source as well! Those spiritual senses in us need to be quickened and activated by the Life and Breath of God within us. *"We have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull in your spiritual hearing and sluggish, even slothful in achieving spiritual insight. Solid food is for full-grown men, for those whose senses (aistheterion - faculty of the mind for perceiving, understanding, judging) are trained by practice (gumnazo - to exercise vigorously) to discriminate and distinguish (diakrisis - through judging) between what is good and what is evil"* (Heb 5:11,14).

In the example I was given, the song I heard was indeed a bird's song but it was only when I looked outside and saw the bird that I was able to correctly discern and see that the body was in keeping with the sound

and so I was able to rightly judge and know the real, true source. If the song had come from the computer game, the body or form would not be congruent with the song. The computer looks nothing like a bird and is not alive and it would be right and correct judgment to conclude that it was not a living bird, no matter how good and real it may have sounded!

Senses often need to be used in conjunction with each other in order to reach a correct conclusion. For instance, if I heard a bird singing and saw a dead bird on the ground; it would be safe to say that the song was not coming from that bird! It was through not only hearing, but also seeing and being sensitive to where the Spirit was directing me to look, that I was able to correctly judge and discern the source of the sound. Of course that is very simple in the physical because we can see and hear easily; but it is also simple in the spiritual. Discerning the Body is not something mystical or complicated, but something simple: if you know someone, you will recognize them! It is imperative that we KNOW God's Son intimately, that we KNOW His Life when we see it and KNOW His Voice when we hear it so that we will recognize Him in one another, appreciating and valuing Life and not falling into the trap of making judgments on our own and ending up seeing, hearing and believing what is not true and thus bringing death instead of Life.

May we have all of our spiritual senses awakened, exercised and tuned in to One Thing: continually discerning Him - looking, listening, touching, tasting, smelling Him - living with, in, through, by Him Who IS our Life!

"For since it was through a man that death came into the world, it is also through a Man that the resurrection of the dead has come. For just as, because of their nature in Adam all people die, so also by virtue of their union shall all in Christ be made alive." 1 Cor 15:21,22.



Knowing Christ

"I know that after I am gone, ferocious wolves will get in among you, not sparing the flock; even from among your own selves men will come to the front who, by saying perverse (distorted and corrupt) things, will endeavor to draw away the disciples after them [to their own party]. Therefore be always alert and on your guard, being mindful that for three years I never stopped night or day seriously to admonish and advise and exhort you one by one with tears." Acts 20:29-31.

When I wrote *The Little Photograph* and *Discerning the Body*, I realized that Father was teaching me some important things about judging and discerning correctly from His Life within me. In *Discerning the Body*, I wrote about having heard a bird singing and immediately deciding it was just a computer game I was hearing when it was in fact a real bird. I had judged incorrectly because I had not discerned the source. Shortly after I wrote that, I was given another lesson following on from the other two, again through a bird.

This time I heard a fantail bird singing outside. So, putting into practice what I had already learned about discerning the source, I looked outside for it. I was almost not going to bother looking because I knew well the sound they make and knew it came from outside so felt I didn't really need to 'discern the source' because this time I knew it was from a bird and not a machine! But I looked for it anyway for two reasons: firstly, because I knew that Father might be wanting to teach me more, and secondly because if I do not put into practice what Father teaches me and has me write about, then my words are meaningless because they are not real or put into action in my own experience.

So I looked outside, scanning the trees for the fantail I could hear. But I just couldn't see one even though I could plainly hear it. All I could see was two blackbirds sitting in a tree. Usually fantails are easy to spot as they dart about and perch on branches with their tails spread out like a fan, but I couldn't see one anywhere even though I could still hear one. Then suddenly the blackbirds flew away and as they did, the sound went

with them... and I realized that the fantail's song had come from THEM! If I had not been looking, I might have been fooled into believing that I HAD really heard a fantail, but because I was looking for the source, I discerned that the bird I'd heard was actually a phony and was false; it was just copying and imitating the real thing. Blackbirds have a call of their own but they're known for being mimics of other birds. When bread is given to the birds, these blackbirds will often aggressively swoop down and frighten away all other birds so that they have the bread all to themselves.

True or False

This incident reminded me once again of the importance of discerning and judging what we accept or reject as true or false. No matter how good and real something sounds to us and to our natural discernment, we still need to discern the source by the Spirit so as to know whether it is truly real and genuine! Although the blackbird's call sounded identical to the fantail's, it was not the real thing because the blackbird was not born sounding like that; it was not part of its nature unlike the fantail which was born knowing its own song and could sing it spontaneously instead of copying it. I have no idea whether the blackbird's call is able to successfully fool the fantails or not; but they could successfully fool me!

Jesus had a word for those with the nature of blackbirds: hypocrites; actors who act a part and pretend something which is not true or real in their nature. It is only those who are BORN from above that have the nature of Christ and are therefore the real thing! The Greek word for hypocrite is "hupokrites" - "hupo" means by or under and "krites" is once again the word for judging and being of an opinion - in other words it is to live by or under someone else's judgments and opinions rather than what we have discerned, learned and judged for ourselves. This is something which our Father is always absolutely resolute about: what comes forth FROM us, must be what He has worked IN us. Otherwise we are blackbirds merely imitating and sounding like something which is not true IN us.

Just like the blackbirds, the false is always out to rob us of our Life (Christ) and to rob us of our sustenance (the Bread of Life). However, if you had never seen or heard a fantail before, you would not know that

the blackbird was only imitating it; instead, judging by your own experience and knowledge, it would appear that there was nothing at all wrong with what you'd heard and seen; the blackbird IS a bird after all (not a computer!), and birds do naturally make sounds! But you would have failed to discern that the sound the blackbird was making was not coming from its own nature. You would probably think that the blackbird's song was quite legitimate and was its own song... why? Because you did not know the real thing!

If we do not know Christ personally and intimately for ourselves in our own experience, and if we are not living in Him and correctly discerning Him and His Body, then we can very easily be tricked into believing that something is of Christ (false Christs/anointed ones) and is real and genuine when it is not... the trap is laid. There is only One Who is really genuine and true; again it is HIM that we must be listening for and looking to see and discern. *"I write this to you with reference to those who would deceive you, seduce you and lead you astray. But as for you the Anointing which you received from Him abides permanently in you; so then you have no need that anyone instruct you. But just as His Anointing teaches you concerning everything and is true and is no falsehood, so you must live in and never depart from Him, being rooted in Him, knit to Him, just as His Anointing has taught you to do."* 1 John 2:27.

If we do not discern Him, then we ought to be very wary. He warned us Himself: *"If anyone says to you, See, here is Christ! or, Look, there He is! do not believe it. False Christs (anointed ones) and false prophets will arise and show signs and work miracles to deceive and lead astray, if possible, even the elect. But look to yourselves and be on your guard; I have told you everything beforehand."* Mark 13:21-23. Do not be fooled or tricked by what may sound and look good; test all things by the Spirit... The Spirit which you have received will lead you into all Truth (John 16:13).

Soon after this bird incident, I came across the following paragraph which struck me with its truth in relation to my recent experiences:

"History is marked by a recurrent crisis which has three aspects. Whenever God has considered that the time has come for judgment, that ordeal by fire has involved these issues. Judgment is not only

penalty or punishment; it is firstly discovery and uncovering. Then it is discrimination and putting things in the category to which they belong because of what they are. Finally, it is passing sentence accordingly, and fixing destiny. This is clearly observable in all the Divine visitations in the history of nations and of the people of God. It will be fully and ultimately true of the last phase of this present world history - disclosure, discrimination, destiny." (T. Austin-Sparks - "The Final Call of God").

For me, Father has been teaching me about discerning Christ not only in others, but also in myself. This means discovery and disclosure of who I really am and Who He really is, which leads to discriminating and judging between the two and putting what belongs to Self into the correct category (destined for death) and thus appreciating and retaining the purity of what is of God so that He can achieve what He desires: His Destiny of Life (Christ) in and through me.

An Unveiling

This joint uncovering or unveiling of who we are and Who Christ is brings devastation and death to Self, and therefore brings increase to Christ's Life in us. Self and our nature are often the foundation we build upon instead of allowing God to build upon Christ and His nature within us. What is built on our foundation is merely hay and stubble which will burn away. Many of the things we cling to are apparently good and spiritual - even necessary things; but God wants us to cling to only One Thing and to build upon only One Thing: His Son.

Without God revealing to us who we really are and Who He really is, we cannot know ourselves or Him more fully. We may know Christ as our Saviour from our sins - and may secretly think we are worthy of saving; but we must also know Him as Saviour from ourselves - and knowing that even at our best and most righteous we are still not worthy of an ounce of His Love and His Life. ALL is totally God's grace and mercy! It is only when we begin to truly see and know ourselves and know how unworthy we really are that we can see, appreciate and know (discern) Christ - both His Head AND Body - more fully.

Just doing good things or 'works' doesn't mean anything to God because

it may simply be our flesh trying to please Him, and NO flesh pleases Him: *"It is the Spirit Who gives Life; the flesh conveys no benefit whatever"* there is only One Who completely satisfies Him and it is His works through us as His Body that will please Him. But doing those works requires discernment, obedience and faith! This is where the awful selfish, religious stuff can so easily blind us... We may see some need and think "I know of a way I can fix that..." or think "What would Jesus do? He would want me to do this..." or "I can help with that need..." or "Yes, I am quite capable and well-suited to doing that so I should..." and off we go. Is that obedience? Is that based on faith? Is that discerning the source of my motivation and action? Is that relying and depending on God? I don't think so... it may simply be Self trying to please God; which is an exercise in futility because it is an impossibility! *"What are we to DO, that we may be working the works of God? What are we to DO to carry out what God requires? Jesus replied, This is the work or service that God asks of you: that you believe (trust in, rely and depend upon) the One Whom He has sent."* John 6:28,29. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Knowing Him, hearing Him and His voice are absolutely essential. Is He satisfied and pleased with our labour and the sacrifices we make and the things that we do for Him? He says that to listen and OBEY is better than making sacrifices; a broken and contrite heart is what He desires. Otherwise we may be living in rebellion and stubbornness and be guilty of rejecting His words; often in favour of accepting other people's words, including our own (1 Samuel 15:22-23 & Psalm 34:18).

Jesus repeatedly said He did NOTHING from Himself but as the Father directed Him (John 5:19,30, 8:28, 15:5). The opposite of that is equally true; actions/works which are done apart from the Word of God Himself, are dead also! This was what Jesus acted upon: hearing from the Father and knowing the Father. Works in themselves are not wrong; it is the SOURCE and motivation behind them which may be wrong! HE must be our Source of everything. When we hear and know God desires us to do something and we by faith obey and do it; those are good works which will bring HIM glory because they have originated from Him, it is HIS direction - He is the Source! When we try to do things ourselves, according to what WE or others think and discern as being right or good, it ultimately results in death instead of fullness of Life... HE must be our Source of knowledge.

One of these issues for me has been that of fellowship or koinonia (communion, joint participation and partnership in Christ and His Life) with others in the Family. In the place where God has us, we have precious little koinonia with brothers and sisters and Father had been challenging me on WHY I have felt such a need and desire for fellowship. I told Him that I KNOW it is important; that I need Him and His Life to be ministered both to and through me and that He has created us to need one another and to be with one another in genuine fellowship and communion through our common union in Him; that we are not independent, solitary parts of the Body. The whole picture of one Body is that of unity and needing and working with one another. While that is all good and true, He kept uncovering and digging deeper and asking: WHY did *I* want fellowship with brothers and sisters? Slowly I began to see that my motives and reasons have often been purely selfish and from the flesh. I have usually wanted fellowship because I like it, I need it, I want it, I enjoy it... but where does Christ figure in that??? That is about me and not Him!

As I saw this, I realized that Father is purifying and refining my motives and who I am. The thing itself is not necessarily either evil or good; but it may be *my motivations and my heart* which are wrong and need changing. My motive and reason for fellowship should not be anything to do with ME!!! It should be only about CHRIST! Our reason for sharing His Life in partnership and fellowship with one another should be so that HE is enlarged and ministered to in each of us; so that when we share His Life with each other, HE becomes more established in our lives - in this way HE is ministered to! HE must have first place. I realized that I have often had myself in His place; I have wanted fellowship for my own self... it has not always been, in the first place, for Him and for His sake. There is just so much of this Self that permeates so much about us and what we do and say... may He continue to purge and refine each of us so that only He is seen and heard, replacing our nature with His nature; otherwise what is often being "ministered" to and "built up" through our "fellowship" or whatever the issue is - is simply our flesh and ego.

Oh, to be dead to this terrible selfish, religious flesh which keeps on rearing its ugly head and taking over what is rightfully God's in His own temple... But what can we do about it? Our religious flesh so often feels the need to DO something; it cannot just give up, rest and trust God! Our

Father has made it so easy and simple and yet we often find it so difficult and hard - WE still want to be part of the picture, the flesh is still very alive! All we need to do is surrender and abandon ourselves completely to Him because: *"I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ, developing and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you."* (Phil 1:6). It is totally up to HIM, not me! That is very good news indeed!!! That means I have absolutely nothing of which to boast or glory in except for Christ Jesus and the good work which He is doing in spite of me and who I am, because it is all based on knowing WHO HE IS! He will never fail; He is absolutely trustworthy and faithful.

May the God of Peace Himself sanctify you through and through, separate you from profane things, make you pure and wholly consecrated to God; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved sound and complete and found blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. FAITHFUL is He Who is calling you and utterly trustworthy, and HE will also DO IT. (1 Thess. 5:23,24).



A Simulator Ride... but not as we've known it

Don't put up with anyone pressuring you in details of diet, worship services, or holy days. All those things are mere shadows cast before what was to come; the substance (reality) is Christ. Col. 2:16,17

Virtual reality rides are popular these days, a simulator can give you the feeling and experience of something real even though it is not real; it is a virtual reality. The whole aim of a simulator is to make the ride as real and authentic as possible even though it is entirely an illusion. In a flight simulator you may feel as though you have been flying at speed through the air, and yet you have not ever left the ground.

The first simulators were created not for entertainment, but for training. They were initially used to train military pilots, and their potential for entertainment was soon realised. We went to the Epcot Theme Park one year and one of my favourite rides was the Mission: SPACE simulator which is advertised as being "as close as you can get to blasting off into space without leaving earth... realistically mimics what an astronaut might experience". As 'navigator' I was told when to push buttons and do what was needed. Of course my button pushing didn't do a thing, but it felt as though it did and the 'trip' was exciting because it all seemed so real.

Obviously, being an astronaut or jet pilot in a simulator is far easier and safer than in real life! Firstly, you don't need any training. You do not need to have years of preparation, years of learning, years of experience. Instead you can immediately 'fly'. Secondly, there is no responsibility. You do not need to check the aircraft, refuel, submit a flight plan, nor do you feel responsibility for the passenger's safety or for the aircraft. Thirdly, there is no risk involved. You are not really up in the heavens, but still on this earth so there is no risk to your life or to anyone else's. No faith is necessary. You can 'commit' yourself to the ride in complete comfort and safety and enjoy the experience. Finally, it doesn't cost very much. For just a few dollars you can experience what flying a space

shuttle or a jet is like, whereas for a real pilot or passenger, it costs a lot; even your life.

The simulator manipulates and stimulates your body, mind and emotions to make you think that you have experienced something true and real. But the reality is that it is all false, all pretend, all an illusion, all just a game. The only thing "real" about a simulator ride is that it is real manipulation, real stimulation and a real simulation. Take a close look at each of those words:

Manipulate - from "manus" meaning hand (manual labour), and pull; to handle, control, influence the action of.

Stimulate - from "stick" meaning to goad, prod to action by encouragement or pressure; incite.

Simulate - from "similar", to be like something; an imitation, pretense, likeness.

Religion is a spiritual simulator ride, a "virtual reality" and an imitation. It may seem like the real thing, but it is not the real thing. It is made by man, it manipulates man and deceives him with a false sense of achievement and spirituality.

"People naturally enjoy excitement and thrills. People want to experience riding in fast cars, high-speed motor cycles or roller coasters, or would like to travel to other worlds that, for whatever reason, are impractical or dangerous - or both. All these things are possible in a simulator. A simulator is a safe and flexible entertainment attraction that takes up to 14 people at a time on a thrill or fantasy ride of a lifetime." (Advertisement for simulator ride).

Many churches can be described as a "safe and flexible entertainment attraction" and so can many forums outside of the church too. They stimulate and manipulate the senses and emotions to make a person feel something, then what is felt is mistaken for being spiritual even though it is *merely sensual*. Most of us are more in tune with what our senses tell us than what our spirit tells us and they are often confused one for the other. Religion always appeals to what we naturally like and what makes sense to us; it is *sensual*. It appeals to our natural values and judgements inciting our admiration for things which naturally impress and affect us:

size, numbers, success, beauty etc. And if we have seen through the shallowness of those external things and they no longer appeal, then it will simulate the internal things that impress us: love, knowledge and what passes as wisdom. Religion is expert at manipulating our feelings of not only awe, admiration and praise, but also guilt, fear, pride and self-righteousness. Rather than embracing the truth that "I have died and Christ now lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), religion encourages you to believe that "Christ has died and Self now lives and rules me".

That may all seem rather "negative" so why mention it? *Because a simulator can prevent people from ever desiring or discovering the Real.* It is only as you begin to realise that religion is a simulator and substitute that it begins to be seen for what it is and destroyed in the heart as we begin to search for Reality and Truth. Unfortunately though, the religious simulator is designed with people in mind and knows exactly what people like - so most people are happy with it and will never question it or seek anything else. However, some people desire the Substance of Christ and are tired of merely playing a game; they were born to fly into the unknown and to move from one realm to another. Whereas the simulator is designed to entertain, excite and stimulate you but not take you anywhere, an aircraft is designed to take you on a journey and transport you from one place to another.

Church, and also many "ministries", can be like going on a simulator ride for a few minutes every week. With a simulator ride you pay your money, get in, have your experience and enjoy it, then exit - and you are in exactly the same place as before. Nothing has changed except that you have had this "experience". And many are content with that and never go beyond a simulator ride experience. You enter into a safe, enclosed capsule which gets you nowhere near the heavens and isn't real, although it may seem as though it is if you have never flown in an aircraft before. The reality is that there is no comparison between the two; one is a substitute and simulation of the real.

With a real aircraft, when you enter you are committed to the journey regardless of risk and danger. You soar above the earth into the heavens and you see far more than in a simulator, which has only a limited number of programmes to run until new ones are devised and installed. In an aircraft you reach your destination which may be on the other side

of the world or in space where everything is completely different!

Some people fear flying. It can be frightening and feel very risky at times and it is the same with our journey with God. But as we learn to yield to where He takes us and to increasingly trust the the Way He has provided for us to reach our Destination, we find that knowing Him and being with Him in the Heavens is worth the cost of giving up all our illusions, security and our life for. HE is our Journey and our Destination!

While this illustration obviously has limitations and flaws, it does reveal some of the problems with religion and with the religious (both inside and outside of Christianity and the church). It may be offensive and upsetting to some to think of their church in this way, especially if the church is what they are committed to instead of Christ and His Body. Nobody likes to be disillusioned or to have their illusions threatened or shattered. Just as Saul on the road to Damascus had to have his religious illusions shattered, so do we. And that isn't comfortable. He believed that he was doing exactly what God wanted, when it was in fact the exact opposite of what God wanted. When he had left his virtual reality and entered into Christ as his Reality, then he considered that 'simulator' to be garbage by comparison (Phil. 3:7,8). What he saw on the road to Damascus completely eclipsed everything he had previously known and believed to be true. When you know and experience Reality (Christ), you no longer desire to play the game; it seems like such a waste of time and effort.

The same God who opened Saul's eyes and spoke to him, longs to open our eyes to see and hear His Son. In the process we are released from the simulator that manipulated and stimulated us, and which we had believed to be real. In seeing Him we see what we could never see without His intervention: the self-indulgent virtual reality that we have been trapped in. He gives us the liberty and the freedom to instead live in the amazing Reality and Truth of His Love, His Life, His Truth, all summed up in One: His Son!

Since God has so generously let us in on what He is doing, we're not about to throw up our hands and walk off the job just because we run into occasional hard times. We refuse to wear masks and play games. We don't maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes. And we don't twist God's Word to suit ourselves. Rather, we keep

everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God. 2 Cor. 4:1,2.



Seeing the Son

Arise from the depression and prostration in which circumstances have kept you - rise to a new life! Shine, be radiant with the glory of the Lord, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you! The sun shall no more be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you, but the Lord shall be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory and your beauty. Your sun shall no more go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.

Isaiah 60:1,19,20

God will often speak to us and teach us spiritual things through natural things He has created and also through circumstances He places us into. The following is a recent example which occurred when we were visiting a farm. A group of about ten of us were outside talking and admiring a sunset. We were all looking at the sky above a house which we were only ten feet away from. I noticed that one person had gone off alone to the side of the house and was looking at the sunset from there. I realised that of course the view would be much better from there, away from the house, so I decided to go and look at it from there too.

When I got there I saw that the view was far more spectacular and beautiful than where I had been so I called out to the other people to come and see. But nobody heard me even though I was only a few feet away from them, everybody was busy talking to each other. So I called again, louder this time and as I did so, I felt the Holy Spirit clearly impressing upon me that I was to pay close attention to what was happening because He was going to teach and show me something important through it.

Again, although I had called louder, nobody heard or paid any attention to me. So I decided to try calling a person by their name. This person heard and responded and came over. She too saw how much better the view was with the house out of the way and she then called the others who

came over and appreciated the much-expanded view.

What God showed me later was that the whole scenario is symbolic of what He has done and is doing with us. Initially we saw some of the glory of the sun but could only see it in part because a man-made structure (house) was very effectively blocking a good deal of our view of the glory of the heavenlies.

Not many (*only two of us*) had realised that there was more to be seen of the glorious sunset. When we moved position and got the house out of our focus, we saw the fuller picture of the glory of the sunset! We saw different colours and shades of colour that could not be seen before, we saw it in all the glory of GOD'S creation instead of man's creation in view. His creation is diverse, creative and organic, like a large tree which was silhouetted against the sunset. The tree wasn't blocking the view because it could be seen through and only added to the beauty of the picture instead of blocking it. In His creation God's unspoken truth is spoken everywhere!

Here is a photo I took of the sunset which of course doesn't do it justice but is still a reminder: *The heavens are telling the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. (Psalm 19:1).*



The house represents man-made churches. The farm house was made of bricks, which are not the living stones that God builds with; bricks are made by man for conformity, each one the same so WE can fit them together easily and build with them. It is man's way and not God's, it is the way of the world and Babylon (*the tower of Babel was built with bricks*) but the new Jerusalem is built from "living" stones - otherwise known as jewels (1 Peter 2:5; Isaiah 54:11,12; Rev. 21:11,18,19). If we are bricks instead of living jewels, we will be earthly and conformed to one another instead of being heavenly and transformed into the image of God, from glory to glory. Only God can build with jewels which transmit His Light and Glory, He has created them and has shaped them for His purposes. He creates them to be fitted together and places them beside other living stones exactly where He knows they belong in His House in the heavenlies which HE is building.

Above the house we had seen *some* of the effects of the Son - some colours in the heavenlies - but we did not see the fuller picture of the Son or the heavenlies in their splendour and glory until we had moved position. The structure made with man-made materials was very effectively obstructing the more excellent view; the glory of the heavenlies was encroached upon by the structure. Obviously the house

was not going to move so that more of the glory of the heavenlies was revealed, and bricks, unlike jewels, are not transparent so the glory could not be seen through them. It required those who heard the call to move position so that they could see more.

God called us away from the man-made structures of organised religion because He had something more and different that He wanted us to see and be part of. It was not until I saw more of the glory of the Son (sunset) that I realized what we had been missing out on when the man-made house had blocked our view! I called out to the others to come on over so they too could share in and enjoy God's glory and see the fuller and more glorious picture. Those who were inside the house, were oblivious to what was outside it; artificial lights were switched on instead. Those already outside had to have eyes to see and ears to hear in order to move, but not many want to hear or see let alone move position... Unfortunately we are often too preoccupied with what is immediately in front of us and are too busy talking and listening to one another and so cannot hear or see anything else or even comprehend that God may have more to reveal to us. Sometimes it will be only one that will hear and see and the hearing may happen because of our personal relationship with them as opposed to preaching/calling to the masses.

" If our Message is obscure to anyone, it's not because we're holding back in any way. No, it's because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and refuse to give it serious attention. All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness. They think he can give them what they want, and that they won't have to bother believing a Truth they can't see. They're stone-blind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ, who gives us the best picture of God we'll ever get. 5-6 Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful." (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

Whatever we are most occupied with becomes the thing which veils our eyes because it is right in front of us, it is our primary focus and consequently blinds us to anything else. Only when we see the Son and He is our focus and is the One Thing that occupies us are our eyes

progressively unveiled as He reveals more and more of Himself and His glory to us and this unveiling and revealing of Himself in all His glory is going to go on throughout eternity!

I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Omnipotent Himself and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon to give light to it, for the splendor and radiance and glory of God illuminate it and the Lamb is its lamp. And there shall be no more night; they have no need for lamplight or sunlight, for the Lord God will illuminate them and be their light, and they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 21:22,23 22:5



Going With the Wind

"The wind blows (breathes) where it wills; and though you hear its sound, yet you neither know where it comes from nor where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:8

I had always thought of this verse as being a description of the Spirit of God Who is like the wind, blowing where He wills, but one day the Spirit of God blew away my interpretation and I saw that the verse is not just about the Spirit of God; the verse describes the wind and then doesn't say "so it is with the Spirit" but says: "so is EVERYONE that is born of the Spirit" (KJV). He says that this is how it is with US - with everyone who is born of the Spirit/Wind! Jesus was describing to Nicodemus what those who were born from above were like; it is a description of everyone who is born of the Spirit.

The Greek word translated as both Spirit and wind in this verse is Pneuma. It is defined as: 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 (eg 2 Sam 22:16, 2 Kings 3:17). It can be said of us that we go where HE wills/blows, yet we don't know how He got us there, or where we'll be tomorrow... we are not in control of our destiny, our lives, or even our direction - He is.

So Father began to teach me something about this Wind that we are born of and live and move by...

The Spirit as Wind

The wind is often unpredictable and blows one way one minute and then changes and blows another the next and who knows why or where or when it will blow next! In a similar way, to those who are of the earth, the people of the Spirit (wind/breath) may sometimes appear unpredictable or changeable as they go wherever the Spirit blows, but to God it proves that He is truly in control of us and that we are adjustable and teachable

and willing to be blown and directed according to His Wind.

As a family we recently went through a large cornfield maze and got thoroughly lost for a couple of hours! The maze was made in the shape of an America's Cup sailing yacht and had interesting facts about sailing on plaques throughout the maze. I know very little about sailing, but one of these facts hit me with its spiritual truth every time we came across it in the field, which was, unfortunately for us, more than just once! It said:

"Apparent wind is the wind you feel as you move yourself forwards; true wind is the wind you feel when you stand still and perceive what direction the true wind is blowing."

This 'fact' challenged me about perceiving what Spirit/Wind we are discerning and sensing; is it apparent wind or true Wind? Sometimes we can be so busy doing things "for God" and carrying on with what our own understanding of Him and His ways are, that we may THINK we are going with the Spirit/Wind and doing what He desires simply because we do feel the wind on our face - but we may be mistaking apparent wind for the true Wind. It may be just apparent wind caused by our own action and ability and therefore not true wind which we are sensing. In order to go on, we must stop! The true Wind/Spirit is often only discerned when we stop moving and stand still and wait - THEN we may perceive which direction the Wind is truly blowing in and can then 'go with the flow'!

Father sometimes brings me to a standstill with a phrase that we teach our children when they are learning to cross a street: "Stop, Look and Listen". Before taking one step, they must be sure that the way is clear. The same is true with us and our Father, He will sometimes tell us to stop, look and listen - STOP our action and be still, LOOK to see what He wants us to see now that He has brought us to a halt, and LISTEN and wait to hear what direction He would now have us go in and how and when He wants us to proceed. When we stop we no longer feel the apparent wind but can then sense the true Wind; and we may need to change direction or change course as a result.

Our self-made apparent wind may be something which was initially the direction of the true Wind. We may have begun going in a certain direction with the flow of the Spirit behind us to support and empower,

only to miss the prompting to Stop, Look and Listen and so missed the Wind change and carried on sailing along in the power of our own strength and ability instead. Wind is unpredictable. It can change and blow in another direction in an instant which is why our Father will occasionally prompt us to stop so we can once again sense the True Wind rather than just the apparent wind. This is one way in which He can test us to see whether we are intent on going on obliviously or whether we are sensitive to Him and His voice. It will reveal whether we will listen and then just carry on, or whether we will not only listen but also obey and be adjustable to which direction He wishes to go in at any given point in time. We are not to be blown about by every wind of doctrine (by the breath/wind originating from man - Eph 4:14) but blown by the true Wind of God.

Going with the Wind/Spirit of God is vital. I have often told Him the obvious: "Father, I cannot get through this day if You do not go with me as my Strength and Life." Eventually He told me to "Stop, Look and Listen" to what I had been saying... and in stopping, looking and listening I realized that I needed to turn those words around and instead say "Father, I cannot get through this day if I do not go WITH YOU as my Strength and Life." He is going on and He knows exactly what direction He is going in! It would be ludicrous to hop onto a yacht to go sailing and say to the wind "Please go with me today, I cannot get anywhere unless you go with me" as though we were in control of where we were going and were expecting the wind to blow us in the direction we planned to go; yet we often treat the Wind/Spirit of God in this way. We first need to stop, look and listen to discern and know which way the Wind is blowing and then simply yield and submit to His direction as He blows us where He desires to, and we go with Him!

Wind is essential to nature just as the Wind of God is essential to us. One morning as I was sitting in our garden, my eye was caught by a small seed which was being blown about by the wind. It was clear from its design that it was created to blow through the air to wherever the wind took it! Eventually it landed on some stones. But it didn't stay there for more than a few seconds because another gust of wind came and blew it up into the air again. It slowly floated back down and landed on some bricks. Again it didn't stay there for long because the wind picked it up and carried it away; the seed was specially designed so that it would

keep going with the wind - waiting until it was deposited into the right environment of moist, soft soil to settle in and germinate and grow. It had no control over where it was blown to, whether that was way up into the air or onto stones or soil. The seed did not determine where it would land or what spot was most suitable for it; that was determined by the Wind, and the same is true with us as His seeds.

In the Bible we are likened to being His garden and the Wind blows on us to bring forth the perfume and fragrance of His Life from us (Song of Solomon 4:16). However, the wind can be both very gentle and very powerful, it may be beneficial or destructive and it is referred to as both in the Bible. Strong, stormy winds can easily destroy what is made by man; but what is planted by God will stand and actually be strengthened by the storm's winds. Ezekiel spoke of the wind of God's anger blowing down what was not solid and of God and thus revealing their true nature and exposing the foundations (Ezekiel 13:10-15). A similar message was given by Jesus in Matthew 7:24-27 - the house (person) that is not built and established on Him and His Life, who only hears but does not obey, will collapse when the Wind blows strongly. Powerful winds can blow down, destroy and uproot - or they can test for strength and depth of roots. Wind strengthens trees and is necessary for blowing away dead leaves, branches and flowers; getting rid of the old to make way for new growth and to blow seeds to where they can bring forth new life.

May we be those who not only perceive the direction of the Wind but who also submit to His Wind and go with Him to wherever He chooses to blow us for His glory!

"You have called me a garden, Oh I pray that the north wind and the south wind may blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out in abundance for You in whom my soul delights." Song of Solomon 4:16.



Planting and Harvest

"He who observes the wind and waits for all conditions to be favorable will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

As you know not what is the way of the wind, or how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a pregnant woman, even so you know not the work of God, Who does all. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hands, for you know not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether both alike will be good." *Ecclesiastes 11:4-6.*

Most of us profess to know, or at least confess with our mouths, that the church is not a building or an earthly organization of people. After all, you can't plant a building even if it is called a church so therefore it must be the people who are "planted"! And so (the reasoning goes) because the church is made up of people, "church planters" can simply take some of these people and "plant" them into a community and there you have a church. However, they may well be planting something which has originated from man rather than from God because in the Bible we don't see church planters anywhere; only Christ planters! The Life of Christ in people is a divine work and sustained by God whereas the life of a church system must be planted, maintained and sustained by man.

Christ is Life. He is the Seed which produces Life. If we are setting up and 'planting' buildings, groups, congregations and churches according to this world's definition, then we are planting something of this earth and we will reap accordingly. We know how true the fact of reaping what we sow is. We tend to get things backwards by planting what we think is of God and setting up the structure so that God can then bless it and bring forth life from it. But God's way is to bring something forth from within us rather than create something external and join us to that; He is concerned first and foremost with who we are (the internal) rather than what we do (the external) simply because if the internal is correct, then the external is immediately taken care of. Jesus said *"Listen and grasp and comprehend this: It is not what goes into the mouth of a man that makes him unclean and defiled, but what comes out of the mouth; this*

makes a man unclean and defiles him. Then the disciples came and said to Him, Do you know that the Pharisees were displeased and offended and indignant when they heard this saying? He answered, Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be torn up by the roots. Let them alone and disregard them; they are blind guides and teachers. And if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a ditch." Matt. 15:10-14.

We think that what we see - size, outward appearances and numbers - are important and significant; but God's ways are not ours! He gathers two or three and says not to despise the day of SMALL things (Matt 18:20 & Zech 4:10). Man's way is to try to make things happen for God by concentrating on what can be seen - the external. We tend to think that the internal will happen (and God will come...) if we set up things for Him and help Him. We think that the physical will bring about the spiritual, that outward things will have an inward effect. For instance we think that if we provide a building to meet in or organize some "fellowship times" (outward, external) then koinonia and ministry (inward, internal) will automatically happen. But it doesn't work like that. Anything which is of Heavenly consequence will result only if and when it has been brought about by God inwardly! If it were the other way around, then WE would be in control and not God. WE could make things happen; WE could bring heaven to earth, WE could indeed plant "churches", WE would have a method and consequently WE would get all the glory! With God's Way there is NO method, NO relying on ourselves or other people, only relying on God to create, produce, supply and maintain what is purely of Him.

One way relies on ourselves and others and the limited resources of this world; the other relies solely on God and the unlimited resources of heaven. One way brings glory and honor to us; the other gives glory and honor to God alone. Life can only come from within - from His Spirit living in us, we must be "born from above" and "planted with heavenly Seed" so that all growth and glory is for and from God alone. Jesus did nothing from Himself, He did only what He heard and saw His Father teach and direct Him (John 5:19,30 8:28) and how much more do WE need to know Him and speak and act only as we hear from Him!

If we plant anything other than simply Christ, we are not planting Life. If

we plant our ideas, our thoughts, our dreams, our ministry, our vision instead of Christ or along with Christ, we are simply planting Self and not Christ. If we plant other's ideas, other's dreams, or what we think of as church instead of Christ, we are planting something which is of the earth and not of heaven. The harvest will ultimately be death and not Life. When Christ is planted, HE brings forth Life and He brings forth whatever expression He desires for that Life - HE adds to His Building daily (Acts 2:47). That may or may not mean that we see the results of that on this earth - what is seen here is not as important as what is true and real in the heavenlies with Christ! Christ and His Body are established in Heaven and when Christ is planted in our hearts here on earth, we in turn are planted into Him and our real Life is with and in Him Who is seated at the right hand of God - HE brings forth His Life in us and through us for His own pleasure and glory! Are we prepared to labor and serve Him regardless of whether we see any visible results on this earth? *"For while Jews ask for signs and miracles and Greeks pursue philosophy and wisdom, we preach Christ crucified, preaching which to the Jews is a scandal and an offensive stumbling block, and to the Gentiles it is absurd and utterly unphilosophical nonsense. BUT to those who are called, whether Jew or Greek or Gentile, Christ is the Power of God and the Wisdom of God."* 1 Cor. 1:22-24.

My children recently planted some sunflower seeds and we have been enjoying watching them grow and learning from them. Every day they are significantly taller than the day before. We planted the seeds and we watered them, but the life and growth from within them had nothing whatsoever to do with us. A seed will always produce what is inherent within it; whether that be good or bad! When Christ crucified is proclaimed and planted, then HE is responsible for the Seed's growth and the harvest (Mark 4:26,27) and we simply do whatever He tells us to - it is HIS work. *"What 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. So neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but only God Who makes it grow and become greater. He who plants and he who waters are equal, one in aim, of the same importance and esteem, yet each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are fellow workmen, joint promoters, laborers together with and for God; you are God's garden and vineyard and field under cultivation, you are*

God's building." 1 Cor. 3:5-9.

We are our Father's Sunflowers, produced by the Seed of His Son planted in the soft, broken up soil of our hearts (Matt. 13:23). We always turn our faces toward the Son, we desperately need Him and depend on Him every moment of every day - we are His - totally and completely. There will be no growth and no life without the Light and Rain (words) of the Son falling upon our soil. Eventually He brings forth a flower which reveals the Glory and Life of the Son and this flower is not just for looking at, it bears many more Seeds from that one Seed which was planted... Sunflower seeds can be crushed to produce oil, or they can be eaten as a nutritious snack, or they can be planted in order to reproduce much more Life - but however and in whichever way they are used (crushed, eaten or buried) the principle is that the seed's individual life is given up in order to produce something of value to Another (John 12:24,25). These seeds are precious, the plant (person) when it has produced the flower and the seeds, will eventually wither and die but the Seed which they leave behind contains the Life that reproduces and keeps on reproducing and is eternal and living!



The person who plants the Seed cannot make the Seed produce Life. That is dependent upon the soil and the Son. Our role as sowers is simply to distribute the Heavenly Seed and God and the soil are responsible for whether the Seed takes root and grows. Half of the sunflower seeds we planted into different soil and they grew only three

inches high and then stopped growing; even though the conditions of water and sun were the same for the other plants which grew to a height of several feet. Not all soil (hearts) will allow this Heavenly Seed to bring forth Life and reach maturity. That is not the responsibility of the sower, we must simply plant Christ and allow His Son to shine and allow His living water to pour forth through us to others.

How is Christ planted? How is this Seed distributed? By simply allowing His Life to grow within us and be expressed through us every day in all things - He lives, we die. He lives in and through us in place of our own life; we give up everything and yet receive Him as Everything! Fruit contain seeds and it is His fruit in our daily lives that will reproduce His Life whether that be through our silence, our words or our actions - He LIVES!

"When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like those who dream. Then were our mouths filled with laughter, and our tongues with singing. Then they said among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us! We are glad! Turn to freedom our captivity and restore our fortunes, O Lord, as the streams in the South are restored by the torrents. They who sow in tears shall reap in joy and singing. He who goes forth bearing seed and weeping shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." *Psalm 126.*



Harvest... but not as we've known it

"Then I heard a voice from heaven saying Write this: Blessed are the dead from now on who die in the Lord! Yes, blessed, happy, to be envied indeed, says the Spirit, in that they may rest from their labors, for their works do follow and accompany them! Again I looked and behold, I saw a white cloud and sitting on the cloud One resembling a Son of Man with a crown of gold on His head and a sharp scythe (sickle) in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple sanctuary, calling with a mighty voice to Him Who was sitting upon the cloud, Put in Your scythe and reap, for the hour has arrived to gather the harvest, for the earth's crop is fully ripened. So He Who was sitting upon the cloud swung His scythe on the earth, and the earth's crop was harvested. Then another angel came forth from the altar, who has authority and power over fire, and he called with a loud cry to him who had the sharp scythe, Put forth your scythe and reap the fruitage of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are entirely ripe. So the angel swung his scythe on the earth and stripped the grapes and gathered the vintage from the vines of the earth and cast it into the huge winepress of God's indignation and wrath. And the grapes in the winepress were trodden outside the city, and blood poured from the winepress, reaching as high as horses bridles, for a distance of about 200 miles." (Revelation 14:13-20).

The Bible frequently mentions harvest time. One interpretation of the harvest is that of souls entering the kingdom, Christ stated that the harvest is ready, but the laborers are few. That is but one side of the harvest though, He also frequently referred to us as being the seed (and the fruit of the Vine) and of course the harvest from the perspective of the seed or fruit, is rather different than the perspective of a laborer! Harvest is a time of great joy and satisfaction for the laborer and for the One who has sown the Seed yet right here is where we can err in our interpretation of the harvest and what it may mean for us. We are not the ones that the

harvest is for; the harvest, the fruit, is always for God alone. HE provides not only the Seed, but also the soil, sun, rain and workers - the only way in which we may be partakers of the joy of the harvest is by knowing His heart and experiencing it with and in Him!

Harvest for the Jews was a time for bringing in not only the grain, but also the grapes and the olives. These three are represented in the Old Testament by the offerings of grain, wine and oil which were required in the temple. The harvest of grain would be harvested, crushed and ground into flour. The grapes would be cut from the vine, trodden on and the juice used. The olives would be shaken or beaten from the tree, pressed between a Rock and a stone and the oil extracted would be kept. The grain would be used for Bread, the grapes for Wine, the oil for Bread, Light and Anointing. So while the harvest is a time of great joy for the Harvester, for the fruit or seed it may not initially appear to be a time of happiness at all... God's ways are not our ways.

Separated

Harvest time for the grain is a very painful, perplexing and difficult time. The seed experiences painful separation. It has had a sword cut between the soul and spirit, it has had the scythe cut it off from its roots in the earth, from the plant that it had been part of and had grown from. It has been separated from all that it has known and been comfortable with. The stalk has been cut off from the natural life source it had relied and depended upon and is now dead and is nothing in itself except for the precious grain, the Seed of Life which it carries. The rest of the plant can be burned, for only the Seed is what is important. This season of harvest is about dying to Self and being transformed through Christ's resurrection by then living for and from the Life of Another.

There have been many who have spoken of an end-time harvest of souls, interpreting that to be a last days revival. Often such things can be based on what WE would like to see happen for God, based upon our desires and values and not necessarily God's... Jesus, in speaking of the end-time harvest, said: *"The harvest is the close and consummation of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the darnel is gathered and burned with fire, so it will be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom* (note: HIS

kingdom!) *all causes of offense and all who do iniquity and act wickedly, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there will be weeping and wailing and grinding of teeth. Then will the righteous, those who are upright and in right standing with God, shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let him who has ears to hear be listening, and let him consider and perceive and understand by hearing.*" (Matthew 13:39-43).

Jesus was clearly speaking of a harvest of the bad and not just the good; the opposite to what we may initially think a harvest is about. He said that at the harvest the false wheat would be gathered and would be burned! The darnel looked almost the same as the wheat, but it was false and not genuine even though it may have outwardly looked good. Harvest is about separating the true from the false, discerning and dividing between that which is of the flesh, and that which is of God. External, outward appearances can deceive.

God is always after the intrinsic rather than the extrinsic; He is concerned first and foremost with who we are (the internal) rather than what we do (the external) simply because if the internal is correct, then the external will automatically be taken care of. If the heart is right, the mouth and the actions and the life will be right. Failure to recognise this can result in our misinterpreting and misunderstanding many of the ways of God in our lives. Man's way is to try to make things happen for God by concentrating on what can be seen - the external; we typically think that the internal will happen if we do the external but the opposite is true - anything external that will be eternal can only first come from the internal work of Christ within us. He is not building a large earthly kingdom which can be seen and celebrated by men, where numbers are more important than His Truth living in the inner man. The Kingdom which He is building is unseen because it is spiritual and heavenly; it is a Kingdom of those who see the unseen and who worship Him in spirit and in truth. The principle in Scripture is that of a remnant at any given time of history, and often a very small remnant at that. In the Old Testament there were times when it was only a small handful of people that remained faithful to God. He will always call many; but few are chosen and few will pay the price required for it costs your life.

God has established the principle of death and transformation to new life

in creation to teach us that this principle also applies to us in the spiritual. *"I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just one grain; it never becomes more but lives by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces many others and yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it, but anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal."* (John 12:24). Perhaps this is why John was told to write "Blessed are the dead from now on who die in the Lord! Yes, blessed, happy, to be envied indeed, says the Spirit, in that they may rest from their labors, for their works do follow and accompany them!" Those who have died to themselves, rest from laboring and striving to please God; they have died to their earthly ways of doing things and yet their works which now have their source from God in the heavenlies, do follow them!

We are so ready to point the finger at the world and think that the harvest at the end of the age is only for them as judgment for their wickedness. But Jesus said this wickedness, this wild wheat, would be gathered out of HIS kingdom where He sovereignly rules! Do not look at the world or at other's sins; look at *yourself* and allow God to bring YOU to repentance: *"Bring forth fruit that is consistent with repentance, let your lives prove your change of heart; and do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham for our forefather; for I tell you, God is able to raise up descendants for Abraham from these stones! And already the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand and He will thoroughly clear out and clean His threshing floor and gather and store His wheat in His barn, but the chaff He will burn up with fire that cannot be put out."* (Matthew 3:8-10,12).

Winnowed

After separation comes the time of gathering in, but much painful work must be done with this grain before the gathering together of the useful parts of the plant - the grain - are finally gathered together and stored, ready to be used by the Harvester (*Mark 4:26-29*). God has much work to do in us. The grain being cut from the plant was only the very beginning of the work of harvest for the Jews, after this initial separation the grain was gathered into sheaves, then taken to the threshing floor where it was either beaten with a rod or trodden on by oxen dragging a metal sledge

until it was separated from the stalk and the husks. The stalks and husks (that which is without Life) were either burned, used for animals, or was mixed with clay to make bricks for man to build with... The grain was winnowed - tossed into the air so the Wind/Spirit could remove the chaff (husks).

God's workers in His harvest are used as a threshing instrument and for winnowing (Isaiah 41:15,16). The harvest is about separating the Holy from the unholy, the Seed from the chaff, the Heavenly from the earthly, the Precious from the worthless, the True from the false. The word in Greek for 'judgment' means to separate and choose.

We each must decide who is the ruler of this personal kingdom of ours. To choose Christ as our Life is to give up our own life - to choose death to ourselves and what we want. Harvest is about separation. Perhaps this is why Jesus said the harvest was ready but the workers are few, because to be a worker in this harvest means you first have to have been separated yourself before God can use you as a laborer in bringing separation - which many grains will not like or appreciate.

This harvest, this separating of what is of earth and gathering in of what is of heaven is not only a future event at the last day but is also for NOW. *"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 obey the good news of God? And if the righteous are barely saved, what will become of the godless and wicked?" (1 Peter 4:17,18).* Ezekiel also saw this beginning in the sanctuary of God and those that were spared and marked on their foreheads by God were those who sighed and groaned over the abominations committed in the city and house of God (*Ezekiel 9:4-7*). May God open our eyes to see the harvest He desires to see happen in our own lives, and for the work He would have us do... *"Jesus said to them, My food (nourishment) is to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to accomplish and completely finish His work. Do you not say, It is still four months until harvest time comes? LOOK! I tell you, raise your eyes and observe the fields and see how they are already white for harvesting."* (*John 4:34,35*).

Why do we need to go through the pain of this harvest and this separating now? It is because there is so much of the earthly nature still

in us, so much of Self, so much religious self-righteousness and pride, so much that is not right, so much of the earthly which has been planted in us and is bearing fruit which must be harvested. We die to our life and way in order for Christ's Life and the Kingdom of Heaven to come forth from us. We cannot see these things in our own lives without God opening our eyes and bringing us to repentance, sighing and groaning over the abominations in this house of God. *"Jesus said, I came into this world for judgment, as a Separator, to make the sightless see and to make those who see become blind."* (John 9:39). This separating and dividing can be in many different areas of our lives, even in what we perceive to be good and even righteous. This separating may even be felt in close relationships within households and families (Luke 12:51-53). It is a separating of all that is of fleshly earthly origin from that which is of heavenly origin, it is about purifying and refining us, sifting and winnowing us.

There can be no resurrection Life without a crucifixion death. There can be no harvest without the sickle cutting and separating the stalk and seed away from the plant. The Hebrew word for "separate" is "nazar" and those who were separated ones were called Nazarites. Jesus grew up in Nazareth and was called Jesus the Nazarene - THE Separated One! We too are set apart and are His separated ones - part of Him and His Body and not one with this world - we are the assembly of those who are called out of this world in which we temporarily live.

The ultimate separation is death - physical death releases us from this world and propels us into the next and spiritually death to Self does the same thing - it brings transformation and resurrection Life. Yet just as a grain of wheat cannot harvest itself and as we cannot physically crucify ourselves, so we also cannot spiritually crucify or separate ourselves or bring about any harvest through our own labor or strength. It must all be the work of the One Who is the Sower and the Reaper of His Seed in our lives so that He alone gets the credit for all the work and receives the harvest. It cannot and will not happen but for Him and His work in our lives.

This is written not to suggest that anyone try to bring forth these things through their own strength, either in their own lives or in others, because it cannot be done. It is something which cannot be entered into without

first knowing God as your Strength and your Life. Rather, this is written with the hope of encouraging those separated ones who may be going through a difficult season of harvest, to have their eyes opened to see what God may be doing in their lives and to willingly and gladly embrace and yield to this work of separation in the sure knowledge that resurrection Life will follow as we are decreased and brought to nothing, hidden in Christ who is our true Life (Col 3:3) and Who is being daily increased and becoming Everything to us and through us.

Living Bread

After death/separation comes the time of resurrection and Life and this new Life for the grain is completely different than what it has ever known before and perhaps different to what it had expected. It now sees that it is not alone, but is just a very, very small part of a very, very big picture! The point is not about any individual grain of wheat, but about the harvest of many grains. After being separated, beaten and winnowed, we are then ready to be ground into powder! In losing sight of ourselves our vision is expanded to see the much bigger picture. We need to realize that sometimes our difficult spiritual experiences are not 'ours' alone but are that of the corporate Body - a much larger harvest. We are members of one another and what one goes through spiritually, the others also experience because we are part of each other.

Prior to being gathered in we are just one of many grains of wheat separated from others, but when the grains of wheat are gathered together and are husked, winnowed and then ground into flour ready to use - you lose who you are. When the grain has been ground into flour; how do you then find what bit of powder came from which grain of wheat, and what does it matter anyway? No, you are simply part of a much larger whole, you are hidden as part of Him Who combines His flour with His Oil to make Living Bread to feed the hungry. 'I' am no longer important, but 'We' are. 'I' am no longer a separate entity, 'We' are one; brought together by our participation with Christ's suffering, we are made into one Loaf, one Body.

Harvest is a regular time and season in the natural and in the spiritual. It must happen at the right time for us, which God alone knows. If the harvest is too soon, the grain is not ready, it is not mature enough and so

is wasted. If the harvest is left too long, it again is wasted. God knows when to harvest His grain, before the winter storms begin, safely gathered and hidden in Him Who is our Storehouse. May we be those who are totally hidden in Him, those who will allow Christ to do this vital work of separation, harvest and resurrection within our lives so that He receives all honor and a truly great harvest with which to feed many!

"Collect your thoughts, yes, unbend yourselves in submission, O shameless nation! The time for repentance is speeding by like chaff whirled before the wind! Therefore consider, before God's decree brings forth, before the time is gone like the drifting chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord comes upon you - yes, before the day of the wrath of the Lord comes upon you! Seek the Lord, require Him as the foremost necessity of your life, all you humble of the land who have acted in compliance with His revealed will and have kept His commandments; seek righteousness, seek humility, inquire for them, require them as vital. It may be you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger."

(Zephaniah 2:1-3)



Idolatry... but not as we've known it

Therefore, my dearly beloved, shun, keep clear away from and avoid by flight if need be, any sort of idolatry, of loving or venerating anything more than God. 1 Cor 10:14.

We often think of idolatry as being an idol that is worshiped by heathens in uncivilised countries, but John and Paul defined idolatry as being anything that takes first place or preeminence in our heart apart from God: Little children, keep yourselves from idols (false gods) - from anything and everything that would occupy the place in your heart due to God, from any sort of substitute for Him that would take first place in your life. 1 John 5:21.

Father taught me about this through the following dream in May 1996:

There was a large crowd of fans (all female) of Michael Fox, waiting to see him. When he arrived and passed through their midst, they went wild and hysterical. I could see very well what was happening as I was observing from above. Several women seemed to be pre-selected to go up to him and speak to him briefly and one of these was going to be chosen as his date. Some of the women were not very good looking and these ones he wasn't interested in talking to at all, but the pretty ones he stopped and spoke to for a length of time. I felt sorry for the plainer ones as he almost completely ignored them. One woman was very pretty and he spoke to her for a while and I wondered how his wife felt about this and also thought it was very rude and unfair of him not to give the same attention to all the women but rather to discriminate between the good looking and plain.

He entered a room where an older woman said that they could choose one of the women he'd just seen, or they could decide by a different method which meant they had to see if he measured up. He seemed bemused by this idea as if, how could he possibly not measure up - didn't she know who he was, but decided to humour her and allowed himself to

be measured to see how wide and tall he was.

Then I was standing some distance away with another woman and we discussed what the decision would be. The women in the crowd were going wild with anticipation and they had to make a choice quickly. I seemed to already know that the decision was already made, to go with one of the women instead of the measuring up. I wondered how Michael Fox would react when he found out the choice was one of the plain looking women.

The big crowd of women waiting for the decision suddenly burst out from the building where they'd been waiting and rushed to where I and the woman were standing, there was almost a danger of our being crushed by their rushing at us. We were pushed right back against a wall. The people were hushed as they waited for the decision, then the lady beside me said, "You must GIVE UP yourself if you want eternal life." When she said the words "give up" I said them at the same time as her, emphasising the words. I realised how opposite this message was to what the women were doing and that they weren't expecting to hear it. She said it again, "You must give up yourself if you want eternal life". The people were surprisingly quiet while she said this but they didn't appear to be taking it in or understanding it, but were looking at her with blank faces, some almost perplexed as if to say, what's that got to do with us and what's she talking about?

Michael Fox was off to one side and rebuked us saying, "I know what you're trying to do and there will be time for that later".

This dream speaks about a problem in churchianity today; the idolising of a pastor, prophet, teacher, evangelist, apostle, worship leader, musician or any other leader. The fact that Michael Fox was used in the dream is significant as the name Michael is Hebrew for "like God" or "who is like God" and speaks of those who presume that their ways are God's ways and their thoughts are God's thoughts and that they are indeed like God and so don't have a problem with being worshiped or idolised by people or in telling people what to do; they effectively take the place of God in people's lives. We need to beware of ones with this attitude or mentality as they are like a "Fox" in our midst. Foxes destroy grapevines and their fruit.

Michael Fox was symbolic of leaders or "stars" which are very visible figures (as opposed to being hidden in Christ) they are looked up to and admired, particularly in religious circles. Often these "stars" are very gifted and able, both with natural and spiritual abilities or gifts. However, sometimes the gifts are treasured rather than the Giver of the gifts.

Michael Fox was amused at the possibility that he might not measure up and this reveals the arrogance and pride that is in these ones. That he was choosing who he spoke to and gave time to and who he did not, reveals not only arrogance and pride but also prejudice and discrimination. The pattern Jesus set was not to lord it over people but rather to be humble servants *And Jesus called them to Him and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great men hold them in subjection. Not so shall it be among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant. The kings of the Gentiles are deified by them and exercise lordship ruling over them; and those in authority over them are called well-doers. But this is not to be so with you; on the contrary, let him who is the greatest among you become like the youngest, and him who is the chief and leader, like one who serves. For who is the greater, the one who reclines at the table (the master) or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am in your midst as One Who serves. Matthew 20:25-28 & Luke 22:25-27.*

The fault lies not only with the leaders. When we as people esteem others more highly than we should (as the women in the dream were), things get out of focus and can even prevent us from hearing or comprehending what God is saying, like in the dream. In organised religion it is usually accepted and expected that the leaders are the ones who hear from God, give teaching, fight the battles etc. Our God is a personal God and wants to speak to **each one**, to have a personal intimate relationship with each one, to teach each one personally. Being an anointed one (which is what the word Christian means) is about going to the **Source** of that anointing; Christ - The Anointed. Being a Christian is about having your own personal relationship with God; not going through, or relying on a teacher or pastor or any other person. We are personally accountable before God for all that we accept and reject. There is no more pure Source than Christ Himself. He is rightfully jealous of His Bride, He wants her heart and her eyes to be focused on Him

alone. She will then see and hear the One she loves in others, but HE will be the focus.

We are to eat from the Bread of Life (Christ) for ourselves; not to feed on each other. This is in effect idolatry if we rely, depend and trust upon someone other than Jesus Christ for those things which He Himself wishes to provide us with. That's not to say, of course, that He doesn't want to teach or speak to us through someone else because He often does, but we should never look to that person as being the source; but rather to recognise God as the Source and so give the glory to Him, and **not** to the person. (1 Corinthians 5:6,7).

The exhortation in the dream is to die to self ("give up yourself") and live for Christ. It is also a warning to not get deceived into idolising any person. Col 3:1-10 talks about this. Some excerpts from this passage say, *"For as far as this world is concerned, you have died, and your new, real life is hid with Christ in God...So kill, deaden, deprive of power the evil desire lurking in your members - those animal impulses and all that is earthly in you that is employed in sin: sexual vice, impurity, sensual appetites, unholy desires and all greed and covetousness, for that is idolatry, the deifying of SELF and other created things instead of God. It is on account of these very sins that the holy anger of God is ever coming upon those who are obstinately opposed to the divine will, the sons of disobedience..."*

The group of women at the end were so pre-occupied with their desire to see Michael Fox again that they couldn't receive or hear the message that the woman gave to them; it didn't sink in at all because their minds and hearts were elsewhere. The women had a passion for a man, not for God, they were in love with the created being, not the Creator. God is wanting a people with a passionate love for Him. The large crowd of women may be symbolic of those who think that they are the bride of Christ but who are not because although their lips may say one thing, their heart's loyalty is not to God and they are unfaithful to Him. The woman who spoke, calling them to give up themselves represents the Bride - the Spirit and the Bride say "Come" give up your life, die to self, be hidden in Christ that we may say in truth "For me to live IS Christ".

In the Old Testament in particular, idolatry and harlotry are often

mentioned together and seem to be almost synonymous. Christ is returning for a pure, humble bride who is passionately in love with Him and Him alone; not for a proud harlot in love with and committing adultery with the world and craving its honour and recognition.

The words of Michael Fox at the end of the dream are a warning to those who speak out to not be surprised should they be rebuked for what they say (sometimes by religious leaders) and that they mustn't be influenced or talked into "leaving it for later" because the time IS short and there won't be time later to repent. At least the women in the dream heard the words; even if they didn't choose to listen and accept them. We need to pray that eyes and ears will be opened before it is too late.

Of course in our Western society idolatry and worship of other gods are not as obvious as in some other cultures; however, idolatry is still present nonetheless. Our security and trust must never be in any person, church, religion, programme or method but only in God; to rely on anything else is simply idolatry. Idolatry is not simply the worshiping of idols in primitive cultures but is alive and well in churches today. Idols are not firstly physical but primarily spiritual. This idolatry is anything that we depend on, rely on or have our trust and security in when it should only be in God! *Their land also is full of silver and gold; neither is there any end to their treasures. Their land is also full of horses; neither is there any end to their chariots. Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, what their own fingers have made. Isaiah 2:7,8.* Not only is materialism an idol in our culture, but even our identity in what we do can be idolatrous. The Hebrew word for work that is worshiped used here is the word: **ma`aseh { mah-as-eh'}** and means:

- 1) deed, work
 - 1a) deed, thing done, act
 - 1b) work, labor
 - 1c) business, pursuit
 - 1d) undertaking, enterprise
 - 1e) achievement
 - 1f) deeds, works (of deliverance and judgment)
 - 1g) work, thing made
 - 1h) work (of God)

This list covers not only achievements brought about through our own ability and things made with our hands, but also the works or acts done for God! No room for Self here. What we do must never be our focus or delight or that itself will become our idol. God is the One to whom we minister first and foremost and anything else we do comes from that relationship and ministry to Him. He is our delight and desire before anything and everything else in our lives!

**One thing have I asked for of the Lord, that will I seek and require:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord in His presence, all the
days of my life, to behold and gaze upon the beauty, the sweet
attractiveness and the delightful loveliness of the Lord and to
meditate and inquire in His temple. *Psalm 27:4***



Being Like Little Children

Jesus called over a child, whom He stood in the middle of the room, and said, "I'm telling you, once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you're not even going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God's kingdom. What's more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving Me. *Matthew 18:3-4 TM.*

God's ways are usually the opposite to our ways; in His kingdom to be mature is to be like a little child, not childish, but LIKE a little child. Among other things little children are loving, trusting, teachable, uncomplicated, simple, forgiving, curious and innocent. Our Father looks for these qualities to mature in us as His children - He longs to teach those who are like a little child, who know that they know nothing...

Children do not assume that they can teach anyone anything, yet without realising it they often teach others simply through who they are and by the simple things they say or do.

God can trust His humble child-like sons and daughters with great truths, great wisdom and great strength simply because they know not only their Father, but they also know who they themselves are; they know that they are simply one of His little children. They are teachable and ready to receive correction from their Father and from brothers and sisters; it does not surprise them or upset them when they are wrong or make mistakes because they know they are but a child and that mistakes are one of the ways little children learn. God can use such ones to display His strength and His wisdom because they will not take any glory to themselves; they KNOW that they are nothing but little children.

Children ask lots of questions, they are constantly learning. Only those who know that they don't know very much are humble enough to risk asking questions and potentially displaying their ignorance. Adults are not so ready to do this, but little children don't care; they already KNOW that they don't know very much and that they need to learn much, much

more! There is the risk that if the child does not ask, the Parent will not give the answer. Even so, no good father is going to tell his children things which they do not need to know or that would be harmful for them. Children should be innocent. For example, as God's children, we do not need to know all the details of the enemy's ways and means but rather need to know our Father's ways; we know that He will tell us whatever we need to know about our enemy, when we need to know it. He knows better than us what we need to know... We should remain innocent to what is evil and be wise to what is good (*Romans 16:19*).

"Out of the mouths of babes and unweaned infants You have established strength because of Your foes, that You might silence the enemy and the avenger." Psalm 8:2. Who would think that the innocence and weakness of infants could silence God's enemy? Yet God's ways are so much higher than ours! We need to be those who KNOW our God. The people who know their God shall prove themselves strong and shall stand firm and do exploits (*Daniel 11:32*). Parabolic, symbolic language is not always easy to understand, yet Jesus deliberately spoke in parables so that KNOWING Him personally and intimately would be the key to all revelation and understanding. He said, *"I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise, clever and learned, and revealed them to babies, to the childish, untaught, and unskilled. Yes, Father, such was your gracious will and good pleasure."* *Matthew 11:25,26*

In Luke, immediately after the Lord's prayer Jesus said *"Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and will say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. For a friend of mine who is on a journey has just come, and I have nothing to put before him. And he from within will answer, Do not disturb me, the door is now closed, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and supply you with anything? I tell you, although he will not get up and supply him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his shameless persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you, Ask and keep on asking and it shall be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you shall find; knock and keep on knocking and the door shall be opened to you."* *Luke 11:6-9*

In this parable, God is represented as being the friend in the house who

gives the Bread - so who represents us in this parable? Where are WE in this picture?

We may see ourselves as being the friend without bread who kept asking for bread and we learn that we are to be persistent in prayer - to ask and keep asking so that we will eventually receive because of our persistence. Or perhaps there may be more to this picture because there were more people involved than just the two men. Here is another possible interpretation that you may want to consider... Are we normally referred to in the Scriptures as God's friend or His children? We are His CHILDREN, and in this parable we are exactly where we are meant to be: in our Father's house, resting in His bed! Banging on someone's door at midnight when they are already in bed, is rather rude; it would be inconsiderate and thoughtless in just about any culture. As Jesus said, "Which of you will go to a friend at midnight and ask for bread?" when it is the end of the day?

Jesus seems to have hinted at this interpretation in verses 11-13 *"What father among you, if his SON asks for a loaf of bread will give him a stone; or if he asks for a fish will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to YOUR CHILDREN, how much MORE will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

The three loaves of bread may be representative of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From the context it seems that Jesus was using two examples: physical and spiritual - one is easily seen and obvious, the other is hidden and unseen. He first mentions physical food, and then speaks of heavenly food - the Holy Spirit. He Himself is our Bread and Meat. We are not awake at midnight with no Bread to feed ourselves or others with; we LIVE with the Bread Provider and have no lack of it! It seems to be speaking of two different types of asking and two different types of relationship. One is asking from a position of lack and does not have an intimate relationship, the other is asking from a position of abundance and lives with the Father. The friend had no bread so had to keep asking till he was given some; but the children of the house knew that there was plenty of bread available and they could ask whenever they were hungry and expect to receive Bread from their Father.

This is a very similar message to the parable of the ten virgins/bridesmaids (*Matthew 25:1-13*). There are four groups of people in both parables. Firstly the Groom and the Father/Friend. Secondly the five foolish virgins and the visitor who have no oil/bread of their own. Thirdly the five wise virgins and the rude friend who know where to GET a supply of Oil/Bread, they know the Groom and Friend but it is not an intimate relationship. They know Him as the Giver, but don't know Him as THE Gift - they don't LIVE or dwell with Him in intimate relationship where He IS their Life and Source of all. The fourth group are hidden and are not obvious although they are essential to both pictures; the Children are in bed, out of sight and hidden, and the Bride is at the wedding. There would be no Father without the Children and there would be no Groom or Wedding without the Bride. We are called to be His Bride and His Children! BLESSED indeed!

Too many settle for just knowing God as a Friend rather than as a Father. Too many settle for just knowing Christ as a Groom at a wedding rather than knowing Him as *their* Groom/Husband. The reason the foolish virgins were not admitted to the wedding feast was because He did not KNOW them (vs 12). He is always wanting and seeking intimacy and close, CLOSE relationship with us. The five wise virgins had enough oil in their lamps for one evening of celebration; but compare that with the option of being united for all eternity with the One Who IS the Light of the world! They were attendants or bridesmaids at a great wedding feast; but compare that to being the Bride who is in love with, and being married to the One who is Love Himself! And the rude friend knew where to get bread at a late hour; but compare that to living night and day with the One Who IS the Bread of Life!

Both parables are at midnight; which may indicate the darkness and the lateness of the hour and that it is time to be in the Father's house, resting in Him and not doing our own works or trying desperately to find Bread or Oil through our own efforts. When we live in His house we rest in Him because we KNOW Him as "our Father"! While others may be knocking on doors at midnight because they do not have Bread to break with others - we are not lacking Bread because He is our Father who abundantly provides ALL His children need, even while we sleep! *Except the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; except the Lord keeps the city, the watchman wakes but in vain. It is vain for you to rise*

up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of toil - for He gives to His beloved in sleep! Psalm 127:1,2

When David was hurting, frustrated, discouraged, angry etc, He TOLD God so and the Psalms are full of his honesty! Christ IS Truth and the Greek meaning of the word for Truth is also Reality. Our little children are real; they display and tell us their feelings openly and it is good and healthy that they do so. It would be an unnatural relationship if they never voiced their disappointments and hurts to their parents but at the same time they know that there are limits and they know their parents well...

A little child KNOWS their Father's character, they KNOW that He would not lie to them and so they simply trust Him because of what He has told them and because of Who they know! Very simple, yet very profound. The attitude of the child honors the Father because they trust that He will provide all they need instead of feeling the need to persistently hassle Him for it (although children naturally DO that sometimes too!)

The parable of the friend at midnight is given immediately after the disciples had asked Jesus to teach them to pray and He gives the prayer: "Our Father Who is in Heaven..." When we know God as "our Father", much of our praying will be changed. So much of what WE think we should pray, may exhibit our unbelief or distrust of Him. He is our FATHER! A Father is primarily a provider, protector and educator. No child keeps going to their father to ask over and over again for the basic necessities of life; if they keep doing so the father will feel hurt that his children do not trust him for even the basics; they must think he is an unloving Father. All good fathers will provide the necessities of life without needing to be constantly entreated. Our Father is the epitome of Goodness and Love! Jesus clearly said this in Matthew 6, He clothes the lilies and feeds the birds, how much MORE so His very own children whom He dearly loves? This was part and parcel of His teaching the disciples how to pray.

The difference is in the faith and trust, or lack thereof, which is behind the asking. Children are incredibly trusting and carefree! The children in the house of the Father will ask for Bread whenever they are hungry, knowing full well that they will receive it; they know that there is a limitless

supply available for the taking! But the friend had to go knocking at the door at a very late hour with no guarantee of receiving anything...

Little children like to remain close to their parents. There are many things they know they cannot do without their parent's help so they ask for help and are reliant and dependent upon their parents and siblings to help them. According to the world, to be mature is to be totally independent from our parents, but according to God's kingdom to be mature is to be totally dependent on Him.

Little children often imitate and copy their parents, Jesus Christ said that He Himself could do NOTHING from Himself but only what He saw the Father doing "for whatever the Father does is what the Son does in the same way" (*John 5:19*). *Therefore be imitators of God, copy Him and follow His example, as well-beloved children imitate their father. Ephesians 5:1*

Children know when a parent is upset, it affects them because their parents are an integral part of their lives. Very little children have not yet developed the understanding that they are a separate being, they consider themselves as part of their parents; their identity is tied in with their parent's. Their parents are the center of their universe!

Children also need, and know about, discipline/training. A well trained child will immediately do what they are told. *You must submit to and endure correction for discipline; God is dealing with you as with sons. For what son is there whom his father does not thus train and correct and discipline? Now if you are exempt from correction and left without discipline in which all of God's children share, then you are illegitimate offspring and not true sons at all. Moreover, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we yielded to them and respected them for training us. Shall we not much more cheerfully submit to the Father of spirits and so truly live? He disciplines us for our certain good, that we may become sharers in His own holiness. Hebrews 12:7-10.*

Little children who are confident and secure in their Father's love will accept difficult decisions and situations because they know, without a doubt, that their Father has planned the best for them because He LOVES them. Even though the child may not be able to understand WHY

they are being submitted to the trials and testing, yet they know it is always for their ultimate good because their Father sees the big picture and knows exactly why, and they trust Him because they know deep in their hearts that He loves them!

Little children seem to naturally be trusting and full of faith. They are transparent and real, they do not hide their emotions and will say (or display!) what they are thinking because they are innocent, honest and have no fear of man. They have not yet been influenced or formed by the world or by people's expectations of them. Little children are not easily offended; but although they may be easily hurt because they are sensitive, they also readily forgive and forget.

A little child owns nothing. Everything he or she has and is, is the property of their Father. Every good and perfect thing comes from Him, and just as our earthly fathers delight in giving good gifts to their children, so our heavenly Father also delights in giving us the greatest gift of all - HIMSELF - Father, Husband, Lover; GOD.

Yes, I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege, the overwhelming preciousness and supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him.

Philippians 3:8a



Being Glass Bottles

We possess this precious treasure in frail, human vessels of earth, that the grandeur and exceeding greatness of the power may be shown to be from God and not from ourselves. 2 Cor. 4:7.

We are often referred to as vessels in the Bible. Another way of thinking of the word vessel today is to think of a glass bottle, in particular a wine bottle. Although our Father makes both the Wine and the bottle, it is the Wine that is the focus, not the bottle or vessel. As a bottle we are transparent; the Wine is seen in us. However, we need to be cleansed and sterilised before being used or we will contaminate the precious Wine that is poured into us and out of us. It is a good lesson in humility when we realise that with a bottle of wine, the bottle is never what is praised and valued but rather the wine that it holds. While the bottle is needed and necessary, it is not the focus, the most important thing is the wine. And when you're thirsty, an empty bottle isn't much use.

Bottles can easily be broken and dispensed with or refilled and used again and again. Who would go to a restaurant and drink a wine then rave about the bottle that it came in rather than the wine? Likewise we don't rave about any bottles, it is silly to lift up a person or vessel as being wonderful when all the time it is **the Wine** that we are drinking and appreciating from that person or bottle, and He's the one that deserves all the praise and glory; not the vessel. *Now I have applied all this to myself for your sakes, brethren, so that from what I have said of us, you may learn to think of men in accordance with Scripture and not to go beyond that which is written, that none of you may be puffed up and inflated with pride and boast in favour of one minister and teacher against another. What have you that was not given to you? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it but had gained it by your own efforts? 1 Cor 4:6-7 About the condition of your assembly your boasting is not good (indeed it is most unseemly and entirely out of place). Do you not know that just a little leaven will ferment the whole lump of dough? Purge and clean out the old leaven that you may be fresh, new dough. (1 Cor 5:6,7).*

There is no room whatsoever for pride in a bottle for we recognise that we are just a container for that precious Wine and that it is only by the grace and kindness and mercy of God that we can be containers of Him and His Life. The Bible says that God gives grace to the humble and the more you recognise God's grace at work in your life, the more humble you feel and the more grace He gives you and so it becomes like a perpetual cycle. If you ever tend towards feeling proud of what God is doing in you or through you, just remind yourself that you're only a bottle or vessel, nothing less and nothing more!

Being purified as a vessel and prepared spiritually is not something that can be shared with anyone else, it is something that has to happen for each individual. A Jewish bridegroom had to take three things to his betrothed; payment or dowry for the bride (*Jesus has paid very dearly with His life*), a written contract (*the new covenant from God*), and finally a skin of wine (*the Holy Spirit*) which they would both drink from when the bride-to-be had agreed to marry him. The Bridegroom would then go away to build and prepare a house for them to live in. The bride was to use this period of time as preparation for her marriage in learning all she could about her husband and learning how to please him.

May we be those who are not only prepared for Him but also purified containers of Christ and His Life, poured out to many!

"The Spirit and the Bride 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!" (Rev 22:17).



Being Soldiers

A few weeks ago we were watching an old movie, "Bridge on the River Kwai", when Father began to speak to me through it and then I wished I'd been paying a bit more attention to the movie! For those who are not familiar with the story, it is based on a true incident from World War 2. British, Australian and American soldiers were held as Prisoners of War in a Japanese camp in Burma and the prisoners worked for the Japanese by building a railway bridge across the river Kwai. The full story can be read online here: <http://www.filmsite.org/bridge.html>

The British Colonel Nicholson refused to allow his officers to do manual labour for the enemy, citing the Geneva convention and immediately entered a battle with the Japanese Colonel Saito. Nicholson was tortured and punished but wouldn't give in and won a major victory over the Colonel Saito after much endurance, pain and agony. The soldiers were all proud of him and cheered when Saito finally gave in and released Nicholson from solitary confinement. But Colonel Nicholson was still a POW and it seemed that after that major victory, the victory went to his head and instead of being in defiance of the enemy, he instead began to cooperate with the enemy. He told Colonel Saito how much better he could build the bridge and how his soldiers would listen to him so Colonel Saito put him in charge of the building project and the British Colonel helped the Japanese and worked for them to prove a point: that the British could work hard and make something better than the Japanese - which I guess you could say was pride!

The British Colonel actually became a harder taskmaster than the enemy had ever been; he not only had his officers working (in spite of the agony he'd endured so they wouldn't have to work!), but also put sick patients from the hospital to work also. He HAD to have his structure finished within the timeframe for the sake of his pride. The prisoners had so much respect for him because of what he'd endured, that they willingly worked and did a great job... for the enemy. You could say that their love and respect for their leader blinded them. They thought they were working for Colonel Nicholson but they were really working for the enemy. The only

person in the film that questioned what the British Colonel was doing was the British Doctor, Clipton. He queried whether the Colonel should be helping the enemy so much and each time the Colonel just brushed him aside and said "You don't understand the army".

Although Nicholson believes the construction is a "good idea" because it builds the men's morale and re-establishes discipline, Clipton doubts the bridge's benefits, because it ultimately serves the Japanese purpose and could be considered treasonous:

"The fact is, what we're doing could be construed as, forgive me sir, collaboration with the enemy. Perhaps even as treasonable activity... Must we work so well. Must we build them a better bridge than they could have built for themselves?"

Nicholson dismisses the notion that the British are aiding the enemy and contributing to the Japanese war effort, interested only in showing the Japanese savages what morally and intellectually-superior British ingenuity and knowledge can accomplish." (by Tim Dirks, <http://www.filmsite.org/bridge3.html>)

The bridge was finished on schedule much to the delight of the British and the Japanese Colonels. But a few weeks before completion, an American soldier escaped from the camp and got to the coast. The British army picked him up and told him they were sending him straight back, along with demolition experts, to blow up the bridge they'd just built because the bridge was strategic and would enable the enemy to transport men and goods across the river Kwai.

This team of soldiers got to the place of the bridge on time, they were to blow it up on a certain day for maximum impact: the first day of its use when it would have a trainload of army personnel crossing the river. They got everything in place at night but woke the next morning to discover that during the night the river level had dropped and their wires were now visible in the water and on the sand bank, but they could do nothing about it in daylight because the bridge was being guarded and they would be seen.

Colonel Nicholson strolled across the bridge with the Japanese Colonel

while waiting for the train, but the British Colonel sees something unusual at the base of the bridge and points it out to the Japanese Colonel... so they both go down under the bridge to take a closer look. Nicholson sees the wire leading to the explosives and follows it to where the British soldier is hiding, waiting for the train to arrive so he can push the plunger and blow up the bridge along with the train. The two British men fight each other and the soldier yells at Nicholson that he is British and doing this for the British army but the Colonel doesn't seem to comprehend this fact; all he seems to be thinking of is protecting "his" bridge, his construction, his structure.

The soldier dies and one of the other soldiers on the demolition team sees that Nicholson is going to sabotage the whole thing so they shoot him. As Colonel Nicholson is dying he seems to finally realize what's happened, and his last words on the movie are "WHAT have I done???" as he falls onto the plunger and the bridge is blown up just as the train is going over it. The British Colonel died along with the British soldiers he exposed and who were trying to blow up the bridge.

I think we often see this exact same scenario in religion. Many soldiers are not fighting within the ranks of God's army but are really Prisoners of War in bondage and working for the enemy. Instead of escaping, these soldiers are kept very busy, engrossed in projects and work and building structures which serve to actually help the enemy, but they are blind to this fact because they are either working for an overseer or they are the overseer and own the project like the British Colonel did. Ownership and possession can be a very blinding thing. We blindly defend and justify what we believe to be ours. True spiritual ministry and service are initiated, maintained and owned by God; we are simply His workers. When we know the reality of this truth in our hearts, it is incredibly liberating because God is the one Who is ultimately responsible for "projects", we are simply stewards who are responsible for doing what He says!

The soldiers who were trying to blow up the man-made structure were prevented and betrayed by one of their own men: the colonel who "owned" the structure because he'd overseen the whole building project. He had basically sided with the enemy without realizing it because ambition and pride had blinded him.

At one point Colonel Nicholson said that the prisoners MUST work; they must be kept busy and must have a purpose and something to work on, because it was good discipline and good for their morale. There is a correlation to this in the Bible. When the children of Israel began to seriously consider leaving Egypt, the enemy's response was to double their workload; to get them so busy and so occupied that they wouldn't have either the time or the energy to consider escaping. "Forget about escaping, just work..." Colonel Nicholson got tricked into the do-ing thing to the point that he became utterly blind; so blind that he did not want his own army to blow up his project, the result of all his hard work, even though what he'd made would help the enemy! Whose side was he on?

While we are clearly not advocating blowing up things men have built, we are prepared to expose and reveal those religious, self-righteous mindsets which we all need to have blown away, because these mindsets limit us and others and can indeed aid the enemy in his work. "For though we walk (live) in the flesh, we are not carrying on our warfare according to the flesh and using mere human weapons. For the weapons of our warfare are not physical, but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, we refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ".

That is not easy and can be a real battle. It requires us to let go of our opinions, mindsets and traditions and to stop trying to be God in our own lives, and in the lives of others. Even the people in the days when Jesus was on earth were told to stop their own do-ing and instead allow Him to produce the Bread of Life in their lives: "Stop toiling and doing and producing for the food that perishes and decomposes, but strive and work and produce rather for the food which endures unto life eternal; the Son of Man will GIVE you that, for God the Father has authorized and certified Him and put His seal of endorsement upon Him." But the people, like us, still didn't get it. They felt there MUST be something they could do. It is a very hard lesson for us to learn that none of our deeds or works are of any value when initiated and maintained by us: "They then said, What are we to do, that we may be working the works of God? [What are we to do to carry out what God requires?] Jesus replied, This is the work (service) that God asks of you: *that you believe in the One Whom He has*

sent [that you cleave to, trust, rely on, and have faith in His Messenger]."
As simple as that sounds, that can be very hard work and a real battleground for us!

We cannot believe and trust and have faith in Him while we are believing, trusting and having faith in ourselves; instead we learn that we desperately need Jesus Himself to produce and be Faith in us and for us. *"One great hindrance to faith is lack of need. If God blesses you with need He will bless you with faith, and faith works best in really desperate need... He deals with the impossible cases. The trouble is that when God gives us a chance to exercise faith, you and I so often cast it aside. There is little sense in believing if at the same time you provide yourself with an alternative way out! Faith works most convincingly when there is none."* (Watchman Nee, *A Table in the Wilderness*).

While many of us may see the parallels of religion with being in bondage, there are other bondages that we may still need freedom from including self-righteousness and bondage to Self. Even when we have been freed from religion, our own laws and opinions can still blind and bind us just as much as religion because we can very quickly and easily make a whole new set of laws which we feel we must fulfil in order to please God.

Our freedom and liberty are very, very precious. They are also very, very costly. True freedom can be quite frightening because we must relinquish control in order to be free. Control makes us feel secure. Rules, regulations and laws make us think we are doing fine when all along, Self is still on the throne of our lives. Simply trusting God can initially make us feel very uncomfortable and insecure because we must truly trust Another...

Escape from the enemy's camp was not encouraged by the British Colonel in the movie. In their welcome speech, the newly arrived POW's were told: "A word to you about escape. There is no barbed wire, no stockade, no watchtower. They are not necessary. We are an island in the jungle. Escape is impossible. You would die." Our enemy often feeds us the exact same lie: that we cannot survive by trusting God alone! "If you no longer follow these rules and do this or that and no longer go here or there, you will not get fed, you will be alone, you will not be protected. Escape is impossible. You would die." And the result of this lie is that

many people are limited and bound by fear instead of being released to live by faith in trusting a Father Who is more than able to take care of His own children!

A commentary on the movie states:

In a late-night meeting between Colonel Nicholson and his officers, attended also by Shears (the American who escapes) and Clipton (the Dr), the men contemplate the odds of successful escape and survival. Nicholson determines that escape is not only impossible but not permitted:

Shears: Oh, I'd say the odds against a successful escape are about 100 to 1...But may I add another word, Colonel... The odds against survival in this camp are even worse. You've seen the graveyard. There you realize. You give up hope of escape. To even stop thinking about it is like accepting a death sentence.

Nicholson: Why haven't you tried to escape, Commander?

Shears: Oh, I've been biding my time, waiting for the right moment, the right company.

Nicholson: I understand how you feel. Of course, it's normally the duty of a captured soldier to attempt escape. But my men and I are involved in a curious legal point of which you are unaware. In Singapore, we were ordered to surrender by Command Headquarters, ordered, mind you. Therefore, in our case, escape might well be an infraction of military law. Interesting?

Dr. Clipton: Yes, interesting point.

Shears: I'm sorry sir. I didn't quite follow you. You mean you intend to uphold the letter of the law, no matter what it costs.

Nicholson: Without law, Commander, there is no civilization.

Shears: You just took my point. Here, there is no civilization.

Nicholson: Then, we have the opportunity to introduce it. I suggest that we drop the subject of escape.

As an English gentleman, Nicholson insists that his men be treated as soldiers and that the officers serve only in supervisory capacities, according to the military code of behavior: "I want everything to go off without a hitch starting first thing tomorrow morning. And remember this: our men must always feel they are still commanded

by us and not by the Japanese. So long as they have that idea to cling to, they'll be soldiers and not slaves." Shears knows better through experience: "I hope they can remain soldiers, Colonel. As for me, I'm just a slave, a living slave."

Are we slaves, prisoners of war, or soldiers? Slaves work for others because of duty and obligation; they have no choice. Prisoners are in bondage and also have no freedom of choice. Soldiers choose to join an army (usually) and submit to training for battle and ultimately surrender their life for their king and country. They are bound, not by duty, but by love for their country and king. We too are bound by Love; love for our Country Above and for our King and His kingdom! May He give us the Grace and Ability to escape the many things which bind and blind us by opening the eyes of our hearts to see ourselves for what we are, and to see Him as All that He is!

Let us then go forth from all that would prevent us to Him outside the camp, bearing the contempt and abuse and shame with Him. For here we have no permanent city, but we are looking for the one which is to come. *Heb. 13:13,14*



Other titles:

Unveiling... Vignettes of Life
Unveiling... Lessons from Life
Unveiling... Being Full of Life
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