



TLM Daily Devotions

May 2017





Labor

In many countries the 1st of May is known as “Labor Day”. Psalm 127 teaches us about labor in vain – and labor with blessing:

Psalm 127

A song of ascents. Of Solomon.

¹ Unless the LORD builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.

² In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—

for he grants sleep to those he loves.

³ Children are a heritage from the LORD,
offspring a reward from him.

⁴ Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one’s youth.

⁵ Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.

They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court.



Unexpected meetings lead to dramatic consequences

John 4.5 - 42 Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar

4 v 39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony,¹

Jesus's meeting with the woman at the well could have passed off as a casual meeting which developed into a discussion, both continuing their lives as before; forgetting they had met. If Jesus had not passed through Samaria, and the woman had not gone to the well at midday the following discussion would never have taken place, but both did something out of the ordinary, something unusual and we, humanity are the richer for it.

It is a meeting of opposites a Jew with a Samaritan; a man with a woman; a rabbi with one who had the appearance of being at the bottom of society ; and the one 'from above' with the lowest of the low. Jesus asks someone who is looked on as a nobody to help him and then all that follows from that request leads to dramatic consequences.

Yet, she, the woman is not a nobody. She is educated, a seeker of knowledge and truth. Samaritan women were theologically educated unlike Jewish girls. She knows the History of her people, the difference and differences with the Jews. Both descendants of Jacob who had traditionally built the well. *v12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?'*

They were in a way the middle men, neither Jew nor Gentile and treated by both as outsiders, to the Jews they were worse than Gentiles, as they had inter married into 5 different groups/tribes each with their own god; maybe that is the link to the 5 husbands. To the Gentiles they were Jews. A small group of people who are squashed, down trodden neither the one nor the other; this story, event, sign, conversation, however we described it changed that.

As Burrige² in his commentary writes 'it sums up all the bitterness of human separation by race, creed, class, sex, profession , status - yet Jesus alone with out his disciples asks her for a drink. No wonder you get a disbelieving reply *'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?'* She is nearly saying "why on ask me?" but somehow she is open enough that it leads into the important discussion.

The dramatic consequences of this meeting where Jesus reveals himself as who he is are

- The woman in her excitement abandons the water jar to share her new found faith with others *v 28 She said to the people, 29 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?'*
- The Samaritans listen to her testimony and to Jesus's word and many believe *v 41 And many more believed because of his word.*
- and the disciples were challenged about their priorities for mission.

This meeting changed the woman. We have unexpected meetings that lead to dramatic consequences either to us or the person we are meeting; we may never know when a meeting has had a dramatic effect.

Adapted from a sermon preached on the text set for the day in The Common Lectionary 19 March 2017.

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¹ all references from the New Revised Standard Version

² Burrige, Richard A. John - The People's Bible Commentary *Bible Reading Fellowship 2008 pg 67*



Flying on the Wings of Prayer

This below is a response from a lady on our thank-you-letter for Christmas to everyone who had been contributing to TLM Hungary with any type of voluntary work: leading prayer group, keeping collect alive, administration, advice, etc. As the letter is so touching and so close to being a 'devotional', I thought it could be a real encouragement to all of us TLMer folks about the living practice of what W.C. Bailey said about: "This mission has been born and cradled in prayer. It has been brought up on prayer, it has been nourished on prayer, and prayer has been at the bottom of its success since the first moment of its life." We are privileged of having many thousands of such supporters worldwide, on the praying hands of whom we may fly! Praise the Lord for them! - Marta Risko

"Dear Madam, 'Grace and peace to you. ²We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters^[b] loved by God, that he has chosen you,' 1 Thess 1,1-4 Thank you for honoring me by thanking me for my contribution to the worldwide activity of TLM. It was a real privilege for me, especially that you called me "colleague" – to be honest, I too feel like this. Maybe my contribution is a background-typed one, but I truly believe in the strength of prayer and God's mercy in responding to our prayers: *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James 5,16*

Ministering with my prayers is a great joy for me each day. Each time I am carrying those prayer requests before the Lord what ASK is communicating to me, and I feel deeply the misery, need, hunger for love, stigma of the patients. And I also feel the strength of that dedicated and selfless practical work that the staff of TLM are doing everywhere. It is the utmost important and most noble job, uplifting the outcast and giving back their human dignity, healing them in the name of the Lord Jesus and calling them to accept Him as Lord and Saviour.

Dealing with people is the most difficult but most beautiful busyness in the world. The Lord certainly will reward these servants on that day, but I am sure: already in this life, too! The reward is they may see the healing of a leprosy patient, accompany him/her through all the struggles; this is the reward given to those who are standing and working there in each their places. To God be the glory for conveying these tremendous things on capable men and women, that they may admire the glory of the Lord through the lives of healed patients!

I am very happy of being part of this work. I wish I could give more funds and I hope maybe I will be able to do that. But I am continuing to pray for the work of The Leprosy Mission, for the patients, their recovery, for the needs of staff, for their love and steadfastness, and I firmly know that He who had started this good cause, is faithful and will lead my brothers and sisters all along. He is faithful and completes His work.

I promise to continue upholding this mission on my praying arms in 2017, too. In 2001, when I was saved, the Lord placed The Leprosy Mission on my heart, and since then I have felt it is my task to pray for it. Besides TLM I am prayer partner in the "Shout of Midnight", praying for the conversion of God's chosen people, the Jew.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. 2 Thess 3,16 The flesh is weak, but the spirit is strong: *„...but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40,3.* Sincerely yours:

Éva Káldi" - praying volunteer, Hungary



Consider the lilies of the field

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than them? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? and why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." Matthew 6.25-34

So why do we worry when God gives us this antidote to worry and fear? Start looking!! Consider His amazing creation, especially some of the small things. The flowers have to just grow and look beautiful. Every winter we look forward to seeing the first flowers appearing, and wonder if the snowdrops will come before the aconites in our garden, this year they did. Even if we have snow, frost, heavy rain or strong winds, they seem to flourish. They are then followed by the crocus, primroses, violets, and a bit later by daffodils and tulips. All wonderfully made by our Heavenly Father. When we used to walk up and down those hills in Bhutan along rocky pathways, we would often see a tiny flower growing somehow straight out of the rock. I was always amazed at these tiny but tough lovely flowers. But I also remember parking my car in the International Office car park in Brentford, and gazing at a flower growing out of the brick wall!! I often used to think how I would like to be as lovely and as tough!!

Jesus also talks about the birds of the air. We have a camera in one of our bird boxes in the garden, and until last year we watched on our television, blue tits or great tits building up their nests, laying their eggs, and the female sitting on them until they hatched. The male would pop in to feed her from time to time, and when the eggs hatched they would both fly backwards and forwards all day long feeding their brood, they knew instinctively what to do, and looked after their young faithfully. It is amazing to watch them. This year we have a sparrow building a nest in the box, and it is interesting to see the different methods used. They usually build in the hedge at the back of the garden, so we wait to see when they start laying. It is a very interesting life when we start considering God's great creation! An antidote to worry and fear! Trust God and be thankful!

Obviously God's creation is not just about the small things, but we need to think also about people! We often judge people by how they look, or what they wear, or how they behave, but I think God wants us to look at the beauty and goodness in people, to see the beauty of Jesus in each one. We have to remember that each of us are precious to the Lord. He made us, He loves us so much He died for us. In John 12:47 Jesus said he did not come to judge the world, but to save.

In *Ecclesiastes 3:11* "it tells us that God has made everything beautiful in its time." Anything that has changed is because of our bad stewardship. That verse goes on to say "He has put eternity in our hearts". This is another lovely thought to meditate on!

What a wonderful God we have!

Mollie Clark English. Went to India in 1961, worked in Purulia for 8 years as a nurse, before being transferred to Bhutan. Worked for 18 years in four different areas in Bhutan until I was transferred to the international office in London as personnel director. I was there for eight years until I retired.



"Falling"

"... my feet stand on level ground" Psalm 26:12

Falling is part of life. Only those who have not learned to walk can possibly claim that they have never fallen. Every parent has worried about the seriousness of falls as his child struggled with the intricacies of walking. Many older people are scared of falling and breaking a hip or leg (although often the broken hip is the cause and not the result of the fall).

At any stage in life, falling can be caused by carelessness or irresponsible behaviour.

When we have international visitors we often go and visit Gruyere - famous for its medieval castle and city, the beautiful surroundings and the cheese that bears its name - and near our home. As visitors' cars are not allowed in the city, broad steps have been carved into the hill from the parking lot.

After the visit some of us made our way down the steps to the car. I was not sure in which part the car had been parked by our son, so stopped on the last step to look around. When I spotted the car, I started walking towards it and fell flat on my face.

I had forgotten that I was one step above the flat parking area. The foot programmed to stop on level ground continued its downward journey another 25 centimetres - with spectacular implications. I am thankful for His protection, apart from the shock, the only part of me that was injured was my pride.

I am specially grateful that concerning the real issues of life affecting time and eternity, I can echo the

testimony of the psalmist that "my feet stand on level ground" and that I am in the hand of *"He Who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy ..."* Jude 24.

Silvano Perotti

Secretary for Europe then Deputy International Director and Director for Support and Development TLMI

Born in Italy - retired in Switzerland.

Worked with TLMI until 1990.



Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,² and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

He said:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5,1-11



Psalm 150

¹ Praise the LORD.¹

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.

² Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³ Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,

⁴ praise him with timbrel and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,

⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD.



Jonah – The Missionary who failed with great success – 1.

Jonah is the most specifically „Missionary” book in the Bible. It is about listening to God, hearing what He says and obeying, even when it seems tough.

„The Word of the Lord came to Jonah: Go to the great city of Niniveh and preach against it because its wickedness has come up before me.” Jonah 1,1

Any mission enterprise commences in the same way...with the word of the Lord. If that isn't so, we are bound for trouble. Sometimes TLM is approached by people expressing interest in gaining cross-cultural experience and a desire to do „good things” for the poor and needy. That is a noble objective, but for a Christian, it is simply not enough. If our skills, our training, our desire is to serve, our compassion is not underpinned by a recognition that God is leading us, we can easily be overcome when the going gets tough.

I recall a TLM mission worker in India going through a difficult period, saying that it was a deep assurance that God had led her to that place, that gave her peace about staying and working through the issues.

This can mean different things to different people. It is a deep sense that God is leading and guiding and that our desire to serve... really comes from knowing Him AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

So the word of the Lord came to Jonah... A city of over 120 000 people, Niniveh was about 1 000 km from where Jonah was. This was no short journey! Niniveh had a pretty wild reputation. In the British Museum, there is a metal image of a man in Niniveh being skinned alive! They had mastered the art of cruelty. The Bible says the city was so vile... that the wickedness came up before God. Jonah was not enthusiastic about this particular message from God! He responded quickly – heading as far away as possible in the opposite direction! The point is not about hearing God... Jonah heard him clearly enough... He just didn't do what God wanted him to.

How often do we actually hear God and fail to respond? Maybe his message can't break through the hard crust we use for protection against unwanted messages from God.

Jonah went to Joppa and caught a boat for Tarshish. The boat sailed into the wild storm...sent by the Lord by the way... so violent the sailors thought the boat would break apart and they would die. They started praying to their gods. Jonah slept through this. The Captain went down and shook him awake, wanting to know how he could sleep during such a ferocious storm. Sailors are a superstitious bunch and they assumed that someone or something had brought this fate on them. They cast lots to decide who it was and the lot fell on Jonah. Jonah confessed his whole story and convinced them that if they wanted the storm to abate, they had to toss him overboard.

There are two essentials if we are to be involved in ministry....either at home or overseas. The first is obedience to God's word. The other is to be shaded by the grace of God.



Jonah – The Missionary who failed with great success – 2.

At this time of crisis Jonah was open and truthful – very aware of God’s calling and his own shortcomings. God’s gracious spirit was still dealing with him, even as he was running away from God.

Often our most meaningful encounters with God occur at points in our life when things seem blackest and we are doing all we can to get away from Him. When asked who he was and where he came from... Jonah replied: *“I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the land.”* 1,9

The sailors reluctantly threw Jonah overboard. The raging sea grew calm. “At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.” Jonah 1,16

Turning dismal failure into success is God’s speciality! Jonah was much better evangelist and prophet than he is given credit for! Sometimes God chooses to use us in the most amazing ways, even at our point of greatest weakness and failure! SO this runaway prophet is heaved over the side and left to a watery grave. But he is not out of God’s sight for a minute! *“The Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah and he was inside the fish for three days and nights.”* Jonah 1,17

Chapter 2, 1-9

Was ever a more wonderful prayer offered from a more bizarre environment? At his moment of greatest despair, Jonah’s heart turned to God. At the deepest, darkest point in his life, when his life was ebbing away, he called for help and God heard his cry. The wonderful grace of God was at work in that foul place...as it can be in so many awful situations. Once Jonah had been delivered spiritually, he was then delivered physically – by means of a messy exit from the belly of this great fish.

When it comes to God’s grace, no situation or place where we may find ourselves because of our own rebellion and disobedience, is beyond the reach of His grace! You may not even realize or accept it. But at some point, some unexpected low mark in our life... God will touch us in a way that surprises even the hardest heart.

“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time: ‘Go to that great city of Niniveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.’” Jonah 3,1-2 This time, there was no running away, he went straight to the task God had given him. He went into that great city and on the first day he began to preach, results were evident. His message was that unless they repented the city would be overturned. Almost instantly, it seems, they believed God and repented, from the king down. The success was breathtaking. And it seems that no-one was more taken aback as Jonah. The king issued a decree that everyone wear sackcloth, go on a fast and give up their evil ways and violence. What was God’s response to their repentance? As always he had compassion and spared the city.

It is not the nature of God to destroy when he can redeem – the cross showed us that.



Jonah – The Missionary who failed with great success – 3.

But chapter 4 verse 1 says: *“Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord: ‘O Lord is this not what I said when I was still at home?...I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity...’”*

Jonah might have had a lot of problems but he understood God. What a wonderful description this is of the nature of God. Is that how you and I know and understand God?

But even though Jonah understood the character of God, his own miserable nature gets in the way. What a misery guts this man is: God spares a whole city and he is beside himself with anger. Why? What is the reason behind his disappointment?

In verse 4 the Lord asks him a question: *‘Have you any right to be angry?’* Maybe that is a question God could ask of us at times. We ask ourselves where God is when something terrible is happening – where was God in the holocaust? Where was God during the madness of Pol Pot? Was he sleeping during 9/11?

It can be thrown out like an accusation but have we any right to be angry? God is compassionate and loving and will do all he can to preserve and save. Clearly the things people do to each other pain him greatly.

Jonah was angry because he was a prophet – that was what God had called him to. He went to Niniveh, this city that deserved nothing but destruction and damnation and he preached its doom with great enthusiasm. But what does God do? Nothing. He just forgives them. Jonah placed a limit on the grace of God. He could rejoice in the own deliverance but not in others’!

Jonah got his identity from what he did, rather than from God, and this is an issue for every one of us.

God’s grace equipped Jonah to do good works and Jonah gained his nurture and identity from what he did.

But it is meant to work the other way, we obtain our identity from and by God’s grace and this enables us to do what He wants us to do!

This is an important principle that many Christian people in ministry ignore. Our identity in Christ is a gift of grace and has nothing to do with who we are and what we do. Jonah saw himself as a prophet and when things did not work out he just couldn’t cope. He went out east of the city, built a shelter and waited to see what God was going to do to Niniveh. A vine grew up to provide shelter from the sun and provide some shade, for which he was grateful, but along came a worm and chewed the vine so that it withered.



Jonah – The Missionary who failed with great success – 4.

This was followed by a scorching east wind and a blazing sun and Jonah grew faint with the heat. *“He wanted to die and said: ‘It would be better for me to die than live.’”*

But God said to Jonah: *“Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?” “I do,” – he said, “I am angry enough to die. But the Lord said: It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Niniveh has more than 120 000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”*

The over-arching message in this book is about the love and grace of God.

It is also about a confused and self-centred servant of God. But we need to remember that God still used him and he still uses us in our weaknesses. Why?

Because He loves us with an everlasting love and He understands us better than we understand ourselves.

Where do you and I get our identity from? Is it from our service in the church? From what we do for missions or our community? Or is it from God?

No-one can take away who we are in Christ if that is where we truly get our identity from.

God calls us to serve Him. The call to service begins with the word of the Lord. Our response should be a listening ear and a willing heart. Our identity and nurture should come from our relationship with Christ, not from what he calls us to do.

And lastly we should be prepared to accept the grace of God in what He decides to do. It is His world, His work, and His Son that He sent to redeem that world and it is our privilege to be His servants.

We need to acknowledge the grace of God in all that we have and are.

Not to do so is to end up like Jonah – miserable and angry and wanting to die. He really was the missionary who failed with great success.



A “theological compendium”

Good morning dear colleague!

Enjoy tip-toeing with me through the Apostle John’s littlest “theological compendium”, and allow God’s wondrous synergy amaze you all over again!

1) An Incarnation Revelation

1 John 1:1 – “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes,....handled, concerning the Word of Life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that Eternal Life which was with the Father and was manifested to us –”

2) An Atonement Orthodoxy

1 John 2:2 – “And He Himself is the Propitiation (atoning sacrifice/sin’s appeasement) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

3) A Sanctification Challenge

1 John 3:3 – “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

4) A Spiritual Authority

1 John 4:4 – “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

5) An Ongoing/Overcoming Faith

1 John 5:5 – “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

Amen.



Psalm 149

¹ Praise the LORD.¹

Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.

² Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
let the people of Zion be glad in their King.

³ Let them praise his name with dancing
and make music to him with timbrel and harp.

⁴ For the LORD takes delight in his people;
he crowns the humble with victory.

⁵ Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor
and sing for joy on their beds.

⁶ May the praise of God be in their mouths
and a double-edged sword in their hands,

⁷ to inflict vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,

⁸ to bind their kings with fetters,
their nobles with shackles of iron,

⁹ to carry out the sentence written against them—
this is the glory of all his faithful people.

Praise the LORD.



Psalm 148

¹ Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights above.

² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars.

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for at his command they were created,
⁶ and he established them for ever and ever—
he issued a decree that will never pass away.

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
⁸ lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,
⁹ you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,
¹⁰ wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,
¹¹ kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,
¹² young men and women,
old men and children.

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.
¹⁴ And he has raised up for his people a horn, ^[b]
the praise of all his faithful servants,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

Praise the LORD.



“Jesus, Son of David ...

Mark 10: 46 – 52 ... have mercy on me” (New Living Translation)

Recently I spent much time with one who lives with a condition he doesn't like to talk about. He fears rejection. “If people knew it might have consequences for my employment.” I tried to listen, to be with him. We have tried to relax together. We went outside, trying to meet with the world. I prepared quite a few meals for him in the hope to bring some pleasure. I shared with him my hopes. He knows about how I seek to put my trust in God. As God felt far away for him we cried together as the blind man did: *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

Last week he went to his work again. He himself felt he should try again. But his heart was so heavy, his anxiety so real. He typed that in a message, the first day, while walking to his office. I received a second message, after one hour back in his office. “OK”.

A bit later: “Working at my inbox; I have agreed with my line-manager: this will be it for the day”.

Today he went again, for a 6th day at his office. Shall he reach his house, later today, encouraged.

I still pray for him: *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on him!”*

Two years ago I retired. I had worked 24 years with The Leprosy Mission. I often visited people who must have felt they couldn't do else but live with the consequences of leprosy. When I spent time with my friend recently I was often reminded to what I read in the eyes of men and women whom I visited. Very often I was not able to express myself in their language and therefore I felt unable to talk with them about their fears.

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us.”

There was a crowd between Jesus and Bartimaeus. Among the people in the crowd there were some who must have had a kind heart towards the blind man. After all, the story tells us that at the end they said to him: “Cheer up ... Come on, Jesus is calling you!”

That same crowd had yelled at him half a minute earlier: “be quiet!” They felt that Bartimaeus should be quiet: Jesus was on his way up to Jerusalem and his disciples believed that Jesus would take place on his glorious throne (*see Mark 10: 32,37*). Here is a King, on his journey to be crowned. That doesn't match well with the loud shout for help, from a man drawing attention to him-self. Bartimaeus should realise he had to wait.

Looking back at those 24 years I feel embarrassed. What did I do, travelling all over the continent? Did I see the fears, the anxiety in the eyes of those who suffer and did I find time to sit down and listen or have I been so busy with planning together with country leaders and program managers? There was always so much to talk about with colleagues. I know I need to do what Bartimaeus did: to call on Jesus:

“Son of David, have mercy on me.”

Listen to the words of Jesus: *“Tell Piet to come here.” “What do you want me to do for you Piet?” “Go Piet, for your faith has healed you.”*

Piet Both retired TLM staff. Becoming more engaged as volunteer with Leprazending Netherland.



I'm Homesick For Heaven! - Part 1

There is so much bad news – let's talk about good news today.

☑ Jesus is coming back!

☑ Could it soon? Maybe before noon!

In life as Christians we need to see life in stereoscopic view – often called: “The Big Picture” of:

The world we live in & eternity - One without the other gives you a flat picture - The two together give you a 3D picture. Same with 3D movies – you need the red & blue lenses to give you a 3D picture To add depth, width & breadth to life – we need to look at eternity as well

To make eternity real we need to see the purpose to life.

Life is flat, hopeless, painful, difficult, meaningless & purposeless without eternity

Add the reality of eternity, heaven & paradise it becomes a 3D picture, in lifestyle on earth & full of expectation for eternity.

The key to a stereoscope view of life, the 3D glasses to life is none other than Jesus!

☑ His salvation for us, His purpose & His desires, His plans for us!

Acts 1.6-11 “...They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 “...Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”

1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

Why am I homesick for heaven? A handful of reasons:

1. I'll see my father, my loved ones & friends who have gone ahead of me!

1 John 3.1-3 “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”

I believe we will see & recognise our loved ones & friends

Why am I homesick for heaven?

2. Heaven is a place with no more:

Sin, sickness, pain, war, lies, temptation, struggles, tears, goodbyes...

Earthly Body Resurrected Body

Perishable Imperishable

Dishonour Glory

Weak Powerful

Natural Spiritual

Revelation 21.1-5 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ... He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Why am I homesick for heaven?

Dan Izzett - Zimbabwe. Retired pastor. I was diagnosed with lepromatous leprosy in 1972. Served on TLMI board for eight years and on the Zimbabwe board for 15 years. I now serve on the ALM board and do advocacy for them.



I'm Homesick For Heaven! - Part 2

There is so much bad news – let's talk about good news today.

☑ Jesus is coming back!

☑ Could it soon? Maybe before noon!

Continued:

3. Heaven Is A Place Of Exceedingly Great Joy

Jude 24 – 25 "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

Why am I homesick for heaven?

4. I Will See The Treasure I Sent To Heaven While I Was On Earth

Matthew 6.19-21 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Keep sending treasure to heaven one day you'll get there

☑ Souls, prayers, love, hope...

Why am I homesick for heaven?

5. I'll see Jesus

Revelation 1.9-18

This will allow me to say: Thank you Jesus!

See Him face to face!

I'll be able to worship Him, bow down before Him in a new freedom

Revelation 4.8-11

Is this enough proof to let you know: Why am I homesick for heaven!

Has this made you homesick for heaven?

Revelation 21:27

Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Acts 4:12

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved

☑ Confirm your place today

☑ Are you homesick for heaven?

☑ Do you often talk about heaven?

☑ When last did you chat about heaven?

☑ Are you going to heaven?

Dan Izzett - Zimbabwe. Retired pastor. I was diagnosed with lepromatous leprosy in 1972. Served on TLMI board for eight years and on the Zimbabwe board for 15 years. I now serve on the ALM board and do advocacy for them.



What's in a name?

Recently on a visit to Glasgow, I was stopped in one of the shops by someone who addressed me by name. I was quite taken aback as although I thought I recognised the face, I had no idea of the name of the individual or where I had met them. However, the conversation revealed that I had spent all of my primary education in the same class as this person but I still had no idea of their name so had to ask. I have never been very good with names and often need to be told someone's name several times before it sinks in.

As I thought a bit about names that afternoon, I was aware of my own name. For various family reasons I have never answered to shortened versions of my name. I have however, answered to other names. I once had a work colleague who seemed to have a mental block about the name Christine and always called me either Margaret or Elizabeth and I answered him every time!

For the hour of my train journey home, I tried to think of the other people who had been in my class in Primary School. I could conjure up in my mind's eye many faces but not a single name. That led me on to thinking about God and that verse in Isaiah came to my mind:

"Now, says the Lord – the one who created you, Jacob, the one who formed you, Israel: don't fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine" (Is 43:1)

What reassurance there is to know that not only did God create me, but he knows and remembers my name and for my sake Jesus died that I might know the truth of those words *"...do not be afraid...you are mine"*.

Today as you meet and greet people by name, remember that God also knows them by name in the same way as he knows you by name. Remember too that He created them and that He loves them as much as He loves you. And when you talk to people today, call them by their name that they may know that they are important to you and that you too love and care for them. When you pray for them and tell God about them, call them by their name for He knows that name too. I know too, that He knows all about them so that when I forget their name and can tell God about them, He remembers their name and mine.

God bless each one of you today – I wish I could put each individual name in that phrase.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for knowing me so well, thank you for knowing me by my name, thank you that you have redeemed me, thank you that I can hear you say "you are mine". Amen.

Christine Osman, formerly International Treasurer of TLMI



Meditation on the Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,

Father, I sense you in busyness, creativity and frustrations of the workplace,
In laughter and tears of the family home, in conflict and peace-making in the world,
In the red-bracken mountain climb...
Open my eyes to glimpses of your heaven each day.

Hallowed be your name,

You call my name, you call me to worship – to sing and dance, to shout and proclaim,
To give praise to your name.

Your kingdom come,

You call me to be your servant, to be your love in the world,
To further your kingdom on earth: show me, guide me, how to serve you.

Your will be done,

That is my daily prayer. What is your will for your people? What is your will for your world?
What is your will for me? I listen for your voice; show me the path to follow.

On earth as in heaven.

May I live your will in the small daily acts of living and in the way I respond to your call.
May I work your will here and now on earth,
With a vision of your glory, the inspiration of your kingdom before me.

Give us this day our daily bread;

You provide for my needs, my food and shelter; give me strength to serve you,
Wisdom and knowledge so I may share your gospel, love and compassion
So I may live and work your good news.

Forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us;

Forgive me for those days and years, those perplexing times, when I failed to respond to your call;
For times when I doubt your power to equip me for the task;
For holding back when I should step forward; for remaining silent when I should speak.
May I forgive those who hurt me, who doubt me, or overlook me.

Lead us not into temptation,

May I not be tempted to divorce action from prayer, nor prayer from action.
May I not give way to complacency, nor undue fear, to arrogance, nor timidity.
Grant me patience to test my sense of calling with humility and the wisdom of others.
May I proceed with deep honesty and integrity.

But deliver us from evil.

Help me to keep to the path that leads to you, to avoid patterns of living that keep me from you.

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

As your servant, may I partake in the growth of your kingdom; may I sing and work to your praise and glory.

Father in Heaven, let your power work in my life. Amen.



Psalm 65

For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.

- ¹ Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion;
to you our vows will be fulfilled.
- ² You who answer prayer,
to you all people will come.
- ³ When we were overwhelmed by sins,
you forgave our transgressions.
- ⁴ Blessed are those you choose
and bring near to live in your courts!
We are filled with the good things of your house,
of your holy temple.
- ⁵ You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,
God our Savior,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas,
- ⁶ who formed the mountains by your power,
having armed yourself with strength,
- ⁷ who stilled the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
and the turmoil of the nations.
- ⁸ The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;
where morning dawns, where evening fades,
you call forth songs of joy.
- ⁹ You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.
- ¹⁰ You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
- ¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.
- ¹² The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.
- ¹³ The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.



Psalm 66

For the director of music. A song. A psalm.

- ¹ Shout for joy to God, all the earth!
² Sing the glory of his name;
make his praise glorious.
- ³ Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!
So great is your power
that your enemies cringe before you.
⁴ All the earth bows down to you;
they sing praise to you,
they sing the praises of your name."^[a]
- ⁵ Come and see what God has done,
his awesome deeds for mankind!
⁶ He turned the sea into dry land,
they passed through the waters on foot—
come, let us rejoice in him.
⁷ He rules forever by his power,
his eyes watch the nations—
let not the rebellious rise up against him.
- ⁸ Praise our God, all peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard;
⁹ he has preserved our lives
and kept our feet from slipping.
¹⁰ For you, God, tested us;
you refined us like silver.
¹¹ You brought us into prison
and laid burdens on our backs.
¹² You let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and water,
but you brought us to a place of abundance.
- ¹³ I will come to your temple with burnt offerings
and fulfill my vows to you—
¹⁴ vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke
when I was in trouble.
¹⁵ I will sacrifice fat animals to you
and an offering of rams;
I will offer bulls and goats.
- ¹⁶ Come and hear, all you who fear God;
let me tell you what he has done for me.

¹⁷ I cried out to him with my mouth;
his praise was on my tongue.
¹⁸ If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened;
¹⁹ but God has surely listened
and has heard my prayer.
²⁰ Praise be to God,
who has not rejected my prayer
or withheld his love from me!



That's not fair

1 Samuel 30

In the second half of 1 Samuel, David is an outlaw with 600 men under his command. In 1 Samuel 30, enemies attack their town and take everything: wives, children, and whatever can be carried. David goes after the enemy army and, after a battle, he rescues everyone and gets back all that was taken, plus a lot of additional sheep and goats. But only 400 of David's men have made it to the battle: the other 200 stopped on the way, exhausted. Now comes the time to share out the loot. It is argued that the 200 men who stayed behind should not get a share of the livestock. David disagrees. 'Don't be selfish with what the Lord has given us' he says, and insists that everyone get an equal share.

The 400 men had a fair point. They had done all the work. They had earned the reward. They should be the ones to share it. Most of us, today, would think the same way. This basic sense of what's fair and unfair, that you get what you deserve, goes deep in us. But David, who the Bible describes as 'a man after God's heart', sees it differently. God sees it differently.

There are other pictures of fairness/unfairness in the Bible. In Matthew 20, an employer hires workers at different times of the day: some work many hours, others only work one hour. The employer insists that everyone get paid the same. I doubt that any of the workers thought that was really fair – even the ones who worked the least. Then in Matthew 22, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king's banquet where most of the guests are the wrong sort of people. The singer Paul Coleman describes this in a very moving way. One of the originally invited guests – who feels entitled to be there – looks around with disgust at the late arrivals, all disreputable people. 'What are they doing here? Is there a single shred of justice (fairness) at this table here tonight?' The king challenges him to take a look inside himself. The song goes on:

*Suddenly I felt my eyes pouring tears on me of liberty
And I realised I was one who needed love and setting free
My brother here, my sister there,
And the banquet host, his empty chair
Forgiveness came and sweet relief
And then I saw why he invited me tonight*

Entry into God's kingdom comes as a free gift which none of us has earned. We know that. And yet we have the idea deep inside that we somehow earn God's favour through what we do. And that leads easily to the idea that if we do more, or live better, we deserve his favour more than those other people. If we start thinking like that, we need God to confront us with the reality that actually we are the ones that don't deserve his favour and a place at his banquet. Let's ask God to keep setting us free, like the person in the song, from wrong thinking about what's fair or unfair, and what's just or unjust, and to transform us into seeing things his way.



Temptation and Trial – 1.

The African lion and the wild cat look so much alike yet they are different. An ancient African theory explains it this way. The same lioness gives birth to numerous cubs some of which are truly lions at heart and some of which are not. How the mother lion does know which are which months after birth of the cubs just before they are weaned, the mother lion leaves the den and then in an unsuspecting moment, she jumps into the den with a thundering roar as if she was an enemy attacking the cub. Some of the cubs stand up and fight back a presumed enemy while others flee the den with their tails between their legs. The cubs that hold their ground to face the danger prove themselves to be real lions. Those that ran away proved to be mere wild cats, false lions. As testing distinguish true lions from the false so also does it prove true Christians from false ones.

Under the old covenant God subjected His people Israel to testing in the desert. They failed that test, which made a new covenant necessary. In today's gospel reading we see Jesus the bearer of the new covenant being subjected to testing again in the desert. He stands his ground and gives the enemy a good fight, thus showing that he is truly the Son of God. Immediately before the temptations of Jesus, Mathew has the story of baptism of Jesus in which a heavenly voice declared of him: *"This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased"* (Mathew 3:17). As he leaves the baptismal waters of Jordan to embark on his public ministry as the Anointed Son of God he had to go through the test. No child of God can go without trials, because this is the means to distinguish between a true and a false child of God. As Ben Sirach advises, "My children, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing" (Sirach2:1)¹

Moses Onoh is the Country Leader of TLM Nigeria.

¹ The Book of Sirach is one of the "deuterocanonical books" (literally meaning a second canon.) A term used since 1546, the Synod of Trent in the Catholic Church and Eastern Christianity to describe certain books and passages that are not part of the Hebrew Bible. The term is used in contrast to the "protocanonical books" (the first canon), which are contained in the Hebrew Bible. The deuterocanonical books are considered canonical by Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and the Church of the East. They are considered non-canonical by most Protestants.



Temptation and Trial – 2.

Jesus is given three tests. The first one, to turn stones into bread, has to do with how we use our God-given gifts, talents and abilities. The temptation is for us to use our gifts to make a living for ourselves. But Paul tells us that spiritual gift are given to the individual *"for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7)*. Jesus would later on in his ministry multiply bread to feed others. But he would not do it to feed himself. Do we see our talents and abilities, our jobs and professions as a means to serve others or simply as a means to make a living for ourselves?

In the second test Jesus is tempted to prove that he is God's son by jumping from the pinnacle of the temple and letting the angels catch him as was promised in the scripture: *"For He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91/90:11)*. Though Jesus fully believes the word of God, he will not put God to the test. This contrasts sharply with the case of a college student in Nigeria who claimed he was born again and to prove it, he jumped into the lion's cage in the zoo because the bible promises that nothing can ever harm God's children. Maybe his soul is in heaven today but his body provided lunch for the hungry lions that day.

In the third temptation the devil promises Jesus all the kingdom's of the earth if only Jesus would worship him. Jesus wants the whole world to acknowledge him, of course, but would he achieve that by worshipping a false god? Can we pursue our goals by any means whatsoever? Does the end justify the means? Jesus says no. He remains steadfast and faithful to God, rejecting the shortcuts offered by the devil. In the end he attains an end more glorious than that offered by the devil: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matthew 28:18)*.

Today, let us realize that as God's children we too are under constant testing. If you do not know it, then try to answer this question: Will you believe in God whether or not you get that one thing that you have always been praying for? Will you still believe that God loves you if your loved one contracts a shameful disease that has no cure, and God does not give you healing in spite of all your prayers? Do you sometime put God to the test and say: "If you do this for me, then I will serve you, but if not, then I will have nothing more to do with you?"

Jesus shows us today that to serve God is to surrender ourselves to Him unconditionally and in all situations.

Moses Onoh is the Country Leader of TLM Nigeria.



THE GLORY OF HIS PRESENCE

Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age, Mat 28:20).

The faith of the Israelites that gave birth to Christianity started with the call of Abraham. Without knowing where this will take him to, Abraham listened and obeyed and God blesses him. This relationship grew up, and God guided it with his laws and the teaching of the prophets. During moments of sufferings and hardships, God promised to send them a Messiah who will deliver them from the hands of their enemies. Later in history, God came in the person of Jesus to accomplish the work of salvation promised through the prophets.

“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose”: Mathew 5:17.

Through His miracles and teachings, so many believed that he would be the one to redeem Israel, but when Jesus began to tell His disciples that he would go to Jerusalem and suffer, be killed and on the third day be raised, their spirit failed, and they began to have a second thought whether Jesus is messiah.

Aware of their fears, Jesus took Peter, James and John to go with him for a prayer session with him on the mountain. There he was transfigured and God opened their eyes to see that Jesus is the Messiah and has on him the Glory and the support of the Father. Here, God repeated what He said during the baptism of Jesus: “This is my beloved son, listen to Him”. He also showed him as the fulfillment of the laws and prophets. This is a proof that his teaching is authentic and from God.

The memory kept Peter and John and other disciples strong in the faith when Jesus finally went to His father and they began to experience persecutions. As Peter puts it, ‘we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of His Majesty’. In his testimony of same John said *“And the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his Glory, the Glory as of the father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John1:14).*

Today our faith is not different. There are some experiences that can generate fears and make us doubt whether God is still with the church. The church invites us to meditate on the authentic truth of our faith from Abraham to Jesus Christ and be firm in faith. In the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah act as powerful reminders of the faithfulness of God to Israel and their discussions with Jesus is an endorsement of the continuation of that faithfulness and presence in the teaching of Jesus and His church. This is what he means when he said that the kingdom of hell shall not prevail against the church *(Then he sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah; Mt. 16:20)*, promising to be with them till the end of time.

It also reveals to us that as God protected and provided for His people during the days of Abraham, Moses and Elijah, he would do for us. This is important today when so many children of God are going through some hard time that many a time tempt us to give up the faith. Think of people who are traumatized by their experience of social injustice and discrimination, those who apply for job but cannot get any, crisis of terminal illness, breakdown of relationship between husband and wife, parent and children and friends? Think of many who think God has given up on them. Today the church is telling us never to give up hope.

Suffering will be minimized when all begin to listen and obey the teachings of salvation brought by Jesus Christ. Like Abraham we should live by faith. We should look beyond our present day experiences to Jesus crucified where our victory comes *(John12:32)*. All we need to do now is to go and step down the power of the cross through prayer. It was only when the Jews looked beyond their snakebite to the molten serpent lifted up that they recovered *(Numbers21:9)*. The blessing of Abraham is still ours. Jesus is on the throne at the right of the Father for our benefit.

Again, there is an aspect of the transfiguration that points to the life after death. Here Jesus reveals to us in His transfiguration the foretaste of the glory of heaven yet to come. With this, we learn that every problem will not be solved here. In the case of termination problems therefore, we are invited to look beyond this life and wait for the city whose builder and maker is God *(Heb. 11:10)*. We should allow this to console us during moments of terminal illness and disaster. So let us listen to God; let us go to the mountain for prayer to behold His glory. Let us try it and be filled with the glory of His presence.



“Catch the foxes...”

“Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.” Song of Solomon 2:15

Here’s something you might want to try. It’s based on an old idea, with some tweaking. It requires a lot of preparation – gathering materials and thinking through how you will implement it. You can implement this activity with a group of up to 50 people, which preferably includes at least a sprinkling of younger children.

Materials: Pebbles, about the size your palm – enough for everyone in the congregation / audience – you can buy pebbles from garden centres; two large, transparent plastic containers [upright in shape, about four or five litres in capacity]; sticky labels [to stick onto the pebbles]; pens to write on the labels; very small sweets [candy for our North American cousins] – something like Smarties, but smaller – must be hard and not in any way sticky – you will need enough sweets to fill one of the plastic containers; a table; table cloth; flip-chart and paper; flip chart marker.

Preparation: Wash the pebbles and dry them. Sprinkle a thin layer of sweets on the bottom of one of the plastic containers [let’s call it container A], add a layer of pebbles, then a layer of sweets and so on until the container is full – shake it and bang it until you can’t fill it any more. Park the unused stones and any unused sweets to one side so that you don’t get muddled [You never get muddled? Okay.] Now empty the contents of container A onto the table cloth. Separate the stones and the sweets. Put all the sweets back into container A and all the pebbles which you have removed from container A into container B. Pack all the remaining pebbles and sweets into suitable containers and schlep everything – containers, flip chart, pebbles, table etc to your meeting.

At the venue: Put the table on stage or somewhere where everyone will be able to see it. Place the two plastic containers on the table. Have the spare pebbles and sweets nearby.

Start your talk by inviting the children to the front. Tell them you want to take the stones out of B and put them in A. Assure them that all the stones from B will fit in A. Let one of them tip the pebbles out of B onto the table cloth and then let them take turns putting pebbles into A. They will soon reach a point where A is full and there are plenty of pebbles left over. You are shocked! You’re amazed! You are puzzled! You assure them that when you tried this at home, everything fitted into A. What has happened? [This is where it is important to have the youngest children involved as the older children know the answer].

One of them will eventually suggest putting the stones in first. You think this is a great idea! Let them pour everything back onto the table, but first let them count how many stones they were unable to fit into A.

Let them start packing the stones into A, but tell them that to speed the process, that they can sprinkle the sweets amongst the stones as they go along. Get them to shake and bang the container as they pack it to make sure that the contents settle into place. Eventually they will get all the pebbles and sweets into A. Congratulate them. What have they learnt?

Put the big things in first. There will be plenty of room for the small stuff once you have taken care of the big stuff.

How many stones were left over when they tried to fill it when the sweets were placed in the container before the stones? Get them to calculate that as a percentage of the total number of pebbles. What does this mean?

Use the flip chart to get the congregation to list a few big things, especially things they think we tend to neglect or which get crowded out of our lives. This becomes a fascinating list.

Get the children to hand out pebbles to each member of the congregation, along with a label. Invite each person to write one or two words on the label to highlight something important that they are neglecting – something that should be a priority, but which is getting crowded out of their day / life. Tell them it is totally private. Stick the label onto the pebble, put the pebble somewhere at their home where they will see it each day as a reminder.

Close meeting in prayer, hand out sweets as rewards to your helpers. Think of ways to improvise.

Maybe you have something that is getting crowded out of your life by little foxes?

Take a pebble...

With thanks to Peter Laubscher, country leader of TLM Southern Africa



Psalm 8

For the director of music. According to gittith. A psalm of David.

¹ LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory
in the heavens.

² Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

⁵ You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:

⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,

⁸ the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,

all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!



Psalm 5

For the director of music. For pipes. A psalm of David.

¹ Listen to my words, LORD,
consider my lament.

² Hear my cry for help,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.

³ In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait expectantly.

⁴ For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness;
with you, evil people are not welcome.

⁵ The arrogant cannot stand
in your presence.

You hate all who do wrong;

⁶ you destroy those who tell lies.

The bloodthirsty and deceitful
you, LORD, detest.

⁷ But I, by your great love,
can come into your house;
in reverence I bow down
toward your holy temple.

⁸ Lead me, LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies—
make your way straight before me.

⁹ Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;
their heart is filled with malice.

Their throat is an open grave;
with their tongues they tell lies.

¹⁰ Declare them guilty, O God!

Let their intrigues be their downfall.

Banish them for their many sins,
for they have rebelled against you.

¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you be glad;
let them ever sing for joy.

Spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may rejoice in you.

¹² Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous;
you surround them with your favor as with a shield.



This is my story -13.

But now, this is what the Lord says- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. I am the Lord, your God, the Holy one of Israel, your savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Isa.43:1-3

I grew up in a middle class Hindu family where daughters often do not get opportunity to go to school. But my parents were willing to send me school even though it was late start. But there is a saying that it is never too late for doing anything good. Since childhood the habit was cultivated in me to help people and listen to their suffering and pain. I liked social life. I am a first generation Christian in my family. After finishing my school level study, I heard about Jesus and his forgiveness available to those who repent with all sincerity of heart. So, with the expectation of getting His forgiveness I started going to the church. But it was not easy for me. My Parents did not allow me to go to the Church service on Saturday. I had to run away from home without telling my parents about going to attend the Church service. I knew if I happened to ask them, they would definitely not allow me to go instead to stop me going they asked me to work household works. They scolded me a lot. They even warned me saying that they would take me out of the home if I did not do what they said to me. This is how; they always tried to stop me to go to the Church. But by the grace of God I did not stop going to the Church. Those were the tough days for me.

I heard about leprosy mission for the first time in my church. On World Leprosy Day, it was Sunday, one of the nurses from my church who worked in Leprosy Mission used to share about leprosy affected people and Leprosy mission work in Church. Once I came to visit Anandaban Leprosy Hospital with my friends to see the leprosy affected people here. At that time I was a student and I am not working. At that time I did not really understand much about it and I had never thought even that I would be working with leprosy affected people later on in my life. But now I consider it as privilege to work with Leprosy Mission here in Anadaban Hospital.

I had been much impressed by the way leprosy patients were given treatment and care free of cost here. Now I consider that it was the calling of God for me to work as counselor with leprosy patients here. After working in United Mission to Nepal (UMN) hospital, Tansen in the Pastoral Care and Counseling Department for 8 years and then I came to work in Leprosy Mission Nepal.

I had heard many stories about leprosy before joining the Leprosy Mission. But when I directly started working with them, I really understood their feelings and personal struggle. As I compared working myself before in general hospital and the leprosy hospital patients affected with leprosy I thought leprosy patients needed counseling more desperately. If we give only physical treatment then it would not be the whole treatment. Counseling plays vital role to provide holistic care to the patients. I feel delighted to work with the leprosy affected people here. Though sometimes it is hard to listen to their stories full of suffering and painful experiences but as counselor I have to empathize to them listening and comforting them. The joy and satisfaction comes when I see smiling face back to their lives when they get holistic care.

Ganesh Maya (Ruth) Shrestha - Counselor of Anandaban hospital. Joining Leprosy mission since 2009.



Psalm 92:1-2

Try to remember, what was your first conscious thought after you woke this morning?

Then, where did your mind go from there?

How quickly did you allow a weight from yesterday, or a feared disaster in the future, to impact your morning today? We can be weighed down before we even got out of bed.

Psalm 92: 1-2 suggests a good way to start and finish each day.

“ It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Thy name O Most High.

To declare thy steadfast love in the morning, and thy faithfulness by night.”

Can we try some self training, and consciously adopt the habit pattern, as soon as we are capable of conscious thought each day, of giving thanks to the Lord, then declaring his steadfast love. So many new days, years, in so many circumstances we have experienced his unchanging love and grace! This reflection and affirmation gives a true, hopeful, and encouraging start to each new day. And it puts into true context the hard stuff that tends to loom large and take over all our perspective.

And before settling to sleep, can we also try to set a behaviour pattern of consciously placing the issues and concerns of the day into the hands of the God who has again and again shown His faithfulness, and thanking Him for it.

And all day long? Well, it is still good, for us and for those around us, if we are co-workers spreading thankful awareness God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

Heather Smith - TLM cross cultural worker in Thailand 1969-2009, and with husband Trevor, continuing work in McKean Rehabilitation Center under the Thai national church.



“My Lord and My God”

John 20:19-29

When Thomas saw and touched Jesus after the resurrection his response was, *“My Lord and My God!”* This is the disciple who has been called ‘doubting Thomas’ because of his response when the other disciples said “we have seen the Lord.” His desire to see and touch Jesus himself before he believed it to be true has coloured our thinking about him down through the ages but think for a moment about the other times Thomas appears in the gospels. Apart from the list of those chosen to be disciples, Thomas is only mentioned three times. On each occasion the words he speaks are very significant.

In John 11 Jesus is about to go to Lazarus who has died. Most of the disciples don’t want him to go back to Judea because the people there had tried to stone him a short while ago. It was dangerous for them to go but Thomas says, “Let us go so that we may also die with him.” Thomas knew that Jesus was set on going and he was determined to go the whole way with Him even if it meant death. That was his depth of commitment to Jesus!

In John 14 Jesus explains to the disciples that he is about to go away to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house. He tells them, *“You know the way to the place where I am going”* to which Thomas replies, *“Lord; we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”* Thomas is the one who is not afraid to voice the question that is probably in the minds of all the disciples. As a result we have the record of one of Jesus’ most well-known statements, *“I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”*

Then in John 20 Thomas meets the risen Christ who knew what Thomas had said to the other disciples and says to him, *“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”* Jesus meets Thomas where he is acknowledging his questions and doubts, accepting and encouraging him. To this his immediate response is *“My Lord and my God!”* He didn’t say “Our Lord and our God” or “The Lord and God”. His response is personal. He has moved to a deeper awareness of who Jesus is. In the same way Jesus calls us to come to him as we are and encounter him in a fresh way with a new awareness of who he is.

*Come as you are; that’s how I want you, Come as you are; feel quite at home
Close to my heart, loved and forgiven, Come as you are; why stand alone*

*No need to fear, love sets no limits, No need to fear, love never ends
Don’t run away, shamed and disheartened, Rest in my love, trust me again*

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Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Christine Osman	18 May		1 Sam 30	22 May
Dan Izzett	16,17 May		Psalms 5	28 May
David, King of Israel	20,27,28 May		Psalms 8	27 May
Elisabeth Barnett	2 May		Psalms 26,12	5 May
Éva Káldi	3 May		Psalms 65	20 May
Geoff Warne	22 May		Psalms 66	21 May
Heather Smith	30 May		Psalms 91,11	24 May
Judy Dinnen	19 May		Psalms 92,1-2	30 May
Kathleen Gavin	31 May		Psalms 127	1 May
Ken Martin	8,9,10,11 May		Psalms 148	14 May
Matthew, evangelist	6 May		Psalms 149	13 May
Mollie Clark	4 May		Psalms 150	7 May
Moses Onoh	23,24,25 May		Song of Solomon 2,15	26 May
Otto Kingsley	12 May		Isaiah 43,1	18 May
Peter Laubscher	26 May		Isaiah 43,1-3	29 May
Piet Both Dr	15 May		Jonah	8,9,10,11 May
Ruth Shrestha	29 May		Matthew 3,17	23 May
Silvano Perotti	5 May		Matthew 5,1-11	6 May
Solomon, King of Israel	1 May		Matthew 6,9-13	19 May
			Matthew 6,19-21	17 May
			Matthew 6,25-34	4 May
			Matthew 28,20	25 May
			Mark 10,46-52	15 May
			John 4,5-39	2 May

			John 20,19-29	31 May
			Acts 1,6-11	16 May
			James 5,16	3 May
			1 John	12 May

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