

Waves & Breakers

***'... all your waves and breakers have
swept over me.'***

(Psalm 42:7)

by Peter Walker

www.1peter1three.weebly.com

I dedicate this booklet to you, Jesus. I thank you for your peace that has no limits.

Introduction

When we see the true God, we are gazing into the eternal. There's no end. His Spirit is eternal, and he has put eternity in our hearts.

I think this 'eternal' experience is one of my 'reasons' for continuing to believe in Jesus Christ. As I gaze on him, walk with him, I never come to a 'wall' or limit of revelation. His Spirit covers everything, and his grace fills all spaces. He whispers to me all day, and moves through my vision all night. I see, feel and know his truth beyond my mind.

I believe God's highest truth is accessible to every person, and that is because it is his own person: Jesus Christ. Jesus can be seen, known and touched by a blind man, a baby, and a broken mind. His very name, Emanuel, means, '*God with us.*' (Matthew 1:23) God's highest truth is not a 'truth', but himself – his touch, his presence, his embrace.

After meeting Christ through faith and repentance, we walk with him. After finding him, we gaze on him. Here we sink and soar into deeper experiences of his Spirit.

I hope these daily reflections and the Scriptures open doors to your soul, to know more of Christ's presence in your life.

#1

'Peaceguard'

Jesus is with us by his Spirit. Let this settle on your heart and mind for a minute.

I tend to 'think' about Jesus more than actually 'be with' him. Do you know what I mean?

When Jesus was born he was also called, 'Emanuel', which we are told means, 'God with us.' (Matthew 1:23) When we let go of our questions, doubts, thoughts and worries, we can allow Jesus to be 'with us'. Like a child we believe, and let his Spirit move in us and around us like a gentle wind. I need to do this more.

His peace fills us and comforts us. But more than that, his peace actually safeguards us. We're told that the peace of Jesus will 'guard' the heart and mind.

Allow God today to build walls of his peace around your heart and mind. Rest inside these safe walls. Live your life – and think your thoughts – inside these walls of God's peace.

'Do not be anxious about anything. Present your requests to God... and the peace of God, which passes understanding, will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.'

(Philippians 4:6-7)

'Jesus said, 'I stand at your door and I knock. If you open the door, I will come in and dine with you...' (Revelation 3:20)

#2

To and Through

God works in us, and through us. He is serious about this 'system', this way of working.

As a parent I will sometimes get my kids to help with this or that. (Not enough, truth be told!) Often I am asking for their help to train them, or develop their character. I don't need their help. In fact, it would usually be easier for me just to do it myself. But for their sake I include them...

This is *not* what God is doing in working 'through' us. It is not a training exercise for our benefit, that he could – and might prefer – to do himself. Throughout the Bible we never see this in God's dealing 'to and through' people. It is always a very serious and meaningful transaction, with very serious and meaningful consequences. I don't understand it, but it is God's way.

Your faith in Jesus, and your actions in his name, matter deeply, eternally.

'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you... I appointed you... I have put my word in your mouth... I am watching over my word to perform it.' (Jeremiah 1:5-12)

'I looked for someone... who would stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one. So I will pour out my wrath on them...'
(Ezekiel 22:30-31)

I often think about the throne room of God. I picture a large, expansive and regal room, with God on the throne at the far end. Light streaming in the windows. A peace that passes understanding, filling the room. I always see this space, this moment, as a time alone with God. There are a few attendants near his throne, but they only bring a sense of 'kingdom', and don't take away from the complete privacy of my time with Jesus.

Every man and woman was formed uniquely by God, individually. I believe every man and woman will stand before God alone. I long for this moment! I can see that moment of stepping away from the crowd, stepping out of the mortal sphere, and stepping into the peace of God's throne room, to meet Christ face to face.

'Moses would go out to the 'tent of meeting' to inquire of the Lord... As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses... The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.' (Exodus 33:7-11)

'I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord... more than the watchmen wait for the morning.'
(Psalm 130:5)

When I think about people who suffer, I sometimes take comfort in the fact that this life – and its suffering – will come to an end at some point. For everyone. And then there's heaven. This hope is real. Heaven is real. No more pain, crying, sorrow, or even darkness.

That is our hope up ahead. We do need to remember it, focus on it. However, there is a hope for even now...

Jesus called us to pray that heaven would break into earth. Instead of waiting for evil to run its course, we can pray in faith that evil is bound here and now, chains broken, bad people stopped and brought to account.

We can hope for the future, yes. But we can bring the future to the present, by praying God's kingdom come.

'Jesus said, 'This is how you should pray... Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...' (Matthew 6:9-13)

'Jesus said, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' (Matthew 16:19)

One Sunday at church, after the service had ended, I remember an impactful conversation I had with a friend, Noel. We were only 17 or 18 years old, and both in the early stages of actively following Jesus.

After catching up briefly, Noel asked me, *'So, Pete, what is the Lord speaking to you these days?'*

This impacted me for two reasons: First, because it was personal, about what the Lord was speaking to me. Not about world mission or what was going on in Christianity or culture. It was about me personally, and my relationship with the Lord. (Matthew 16:15)

Secondly, it struck me as different to what people normally chat about after church, me included. We don't often 'fellowship' about the Lord, but just catch up about life. That's fine, but it is worth considering. The church lobby can be a place where we seldom actually talk about what God is doing in each other's lives.

'We ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus... just as you are doing, to do so more and more.'

(1 Thessalonians 4:1)

'I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth... I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body.' (2 Peter 1:12-13)

When I talk to people about Jesus – people who are not Christians – I find myself simplifying verses, stories, the message, the point.

Of course there are depths without measure in the eternal God. We can go deep, deep, deep... But Jesus didn't preach like that. He didn't minister like that. His disciples were 'unschooled men', and their writings are also simple, open doors of invitation.

As you grow in your knowledge of the Lord, and your studies of Scripture, never let this knowledge become a stumbling block to other people.

The most natural way to keep your message simple and your understanding deep, clear and Spirit-filled, is to share it with people who do not yet know the Lord. We cannot do this on our own. Ask Jesus today to open doors for you to share about him with those who are lost, those who are seeking.

'Unless you change and become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.'

(Matthew 18:3)

'Knowledge puffs up, while love builds up.'

(1 Corinthians 8:1)

Treasure in Heaven

Jesus told us that his truth – as in, he himself – would set us free. Each of us. Free in the very essence of our being. Set apart by God. Untouchable by the will, words or envy of mankind.

Allow this to soak in. You belong to Jesus, and only him. He formed you in the womb, and made you unique in his image.

When we realize this, that the chains are gone, we can start to walk in our unique calling. We can begin to do what God prompts us to do, deep down within our spirit. And so we begin to *'store up for ourselves treasure in heaven.'* (Matthew 6:20)

Know that you belong to Jesus. Know that he sets you free. And walk with him, and do what he leads you to do. No one can hinder the treasure you store up for yourself in this way. One day the Lord will reveal to you your inheritance.

'To all who received Jesus, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.'

(John 1:12-13)

'If Jesus sets you free, you will be free indeed!'

(John 8:36)

When my wife and I had four small kids we were living in a pretty rough part of town. It stressed me – the kids' bikes getting stolen, our car broken into (by 6 guys, while I was watching out the window), another friend's car stolen outside our home on a quiet Sunday afternoon, while she was inside having coffee with us...

An opportunity came our way to move to a safer place. We did, and it was a true blessing to us. *(And my friends, there is a time for this, a truth in this; even Jesus admonished people to move away from persecution, where and when they could.)*

So when we move 'up' in the world, we often move 'out', or away from people. We move up and away!

But Jesus did the opposite. He set aside his glory, his crown, and we're told that *'he became nothing'*. He did this in order to come meet us in the valley of the shadow of death, here on earth.

'The people walking darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.' (Isaiah 9:2)

Jesus doesn't move up and away from us, no matter how much glory he gets, or how big a gathering. He sets aside his glory to come find you, and be with just you.

'Anyone who comes to me, I will not turn away.'
(John 6:37)

I lived on ships for four years as a kid. It was adventurous and different. There is no movie that captures the sheer magnitude of the ocean, and its power and expanse. I used to stand on the deck when we were at sea and watch the rich blue waters swell and foam, and I could hear nothing but the rush and gush of wind and waves, no land in sight... The deepest part of the ocean is seven miles down. That's deep!

You know, we can go deeper in the Lord. Like any relationship, we can get past words and even memories, to spirit connections, and spirit understanding. The same is true with Jesus.

The title of this book is '*Waves and Breakers*', and it comes from Psalm 42:7. I find it interesting that the writer of that verse could only describe his relationship with God in terms of '*waves and breakers*' and white noise and waterfalls. In a sense, my friend, 'deep' in relationship is a humbling place, because you might have less answers, less facts and figures. You will be beyond reason, beyond words. But if we're willing to go 'low', go humble, we can go deep...

'Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me.'
(Psalm 42:7)

'Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.' (Mark 8: 35)

#10

Who do you think you are?

In your job there are rules and roles. On sport teams, organizations, etc. But when spiritual truths and the spirit world cuts across our man-made institutions, traditions and etiquette, roles and rules change. The queen may be in charge of the servant, but in a moment of spiritual activity the servant may have a word of authority that is higher than the queen's.

As a child of Jesus, no man, woman, king or queen has a hold on your truest person, your highest call, your eternal identity and destiny. So as the Lord whispers to you, leads you, in words and actions, follow peacefully and confidently.

The 'authority' of Jesus was challenged. Two things are important to note: First, if his spiritual authority was challenged, so will your spiritual authority be challenged. Secondly, Jesus did not deign to argue it. After posing a shrewd counter question which they would not answer, Jesus said, ***'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'*** (Mark 11:33)

When your spiritual authority is challenged, it is because it is real, it is felt, and someone doesn't like it. Don't argue it. Don't give in, either! Keep doing what God calls you to do!

'I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.' (Revelation 3:8)

'The greatest among you will be your servant.'
(Matthew 23:11)

#11

A Big Change

Sometimes 'repentance' will require a big, practical change in your life. It may require a move, like moving house and community. It may require a change of job, and phone number, and friend group.

I hope this gives you a sense of freedom, and not fear! Jesus allows us, even calls us, to break free and start afresh. This is not the same as running and hiding from our sin or people. This is not to *avoid* true repentance, but to put it into action in our lives.

We are called to humbly believe in Jesus, repent of our sin, and apologize to people we have sinned against. But we are also called to 'follow'.

Jesus called people to move, walk, change. When he called his disciples to follow him, they left their jobs.

Is Christ offering you a new start? Is he calling you 'out' of a situation, and to establish new borders?

'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'

(Galatians 2:20)

'Depart, depart, go out from there!... Come out from it and be pure...' (Isaiah 52:11)

#12

Receive

The world is a cruel place. Many – even most – live in hardship and poverty. Sometimes we can feel overwhelmed by the suffering, and then find it hard to actually receive and enjoy good things that God gives us.

Children don't do this. Children enjoy the moment. Children delight in something special that just they have, and no one else has. They smile. They hold it tight. They laugh. And Jesus admonished us to be like children. He said that if we did not *'change and become like children'* we could not enter his kingdom. (Matthew 18:3)

Another powerful story is when a woman, in sacrifice and worship, poured an extravagant amount of costly perfume on Jesus. The disciples (you, me, the church) criticized her for this, saying the money was wasted when there were poor people who needed it. Jesus actually rebuked the disciples, saying that what this lady had done was so pure and beautiful that it would be told of wherever the gospel was told. (Mark 14:1-11)

Receive the peace and good things that Jesus gives you. Rest like a child. Smile, receive, enjoy.

'He lays a table before me in the presence of my enemies.' (Psalm 23:5)

'God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.' (1 Timothy 6:17)

#13

While You Sleep

One time I showed a group of men a Christian movie. Truth is, it was a deliberate choice in order to honor the Lord, a witness. I could have shown them any movie, and it was a secular group I was facilitating, for a non-Christian employer.

A few years later one of these men – who I did not recognize personally – called out to me across the street. He reminded me that he had been in that group. He went on to remind me of the movie I had shown them. He said he later bought the movie for his family, and that he, his wife and kids, were now Christians.

This stuck with me. I had always heard the verse that God's word will not return empty (Isaiah 55:11), but often I don't remember, don't rest in the truth that our witness and faith-actions for the Lord carry on in power and reach, even after we have forgotten about them. Rest today, knowing and believing that your words and work over the years continue to bear fruit.

'Jesus said, 'The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how...' (Mark 4:26-29)

'On that day your work will be shown for what it is...' (1 Corinthians 3:13)

I love to whisper to God. When I finally get alone in the day – sometimes not really till I'm lying in bed – I whisper to the Lord. I listen for his whisper. I let my heart and mind sink into his Spirit.

When Elijah had called down fire from heaven, and then directed an army of people to kill 900 false prophets of Baal, he was depleted. He ran away. He ran for 40 days through the desert, to a cave. He was looking to meet with God in a deep, personal, true way.

Interestingly, an angel of the Lord – or, as it were, the Lord himself – met Elijah and strengthened him with word and food half way through this run. But Elijah was not content with this angelic encounter. He ran until he could get alone with God deep inside a dark cave. God met him, spoke with him, but then told him to wait to hear even a deeper word from him. This was the word Elijah was waiting for. It was on the other side of great noise, earthquakes and wind that split rocks. Yes, on the other side of this, was the whisper of God.

'... a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered rocks... but the Lord was not in the wind... There was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then came fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire came a gentle whisper...' (1 Kings 19:11-13)

This morning I was thinking about putting up some verses on the fridge, as a reminder to myself and my kids. They were pretty hard-hitting verses. Then I felt the Lord call to my mind this reflection...

We are called to be worshippers '*in Spirit and in truth.*' (John 4:24) Not just truth. There are 'true' things and true words, even in the Bible, but they don't 'stand alone', as it were. Remember, even the devil quoted the Bible. (Matthew 4:1-11) Words – even true, scriptural words – are not necessarily the words of the Spirit at that moment.

I felt a gentle prompting on my spirit to *not* put these particular Scriptures on the fridge. I felt the Lord say to me that these did not carry his Spirit right now for the family, to encourage.

The living Word of the Lord is not just Bible verses. These can be misplaced, misquoted, or just quoted when the Spirit is not leading or speaking. The living Word of the Lord is *both* truth and Spirit. They come together or the Word is not the Word of God.

'God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in Spirit and in truth.' (John 4:24)

Many people admire Jesus - his teaching, his responses, his gentleness, his power. Many consider Jesus an important spiritual figure in their understanding of God and truth.

However, Jesus would not accept 'admiration'. One time when the crowds were 'approving' of Jesus, we're told that ***'Jesus would not entrust himself to them... for he knew what was in a man.'***
(John 2:24-25)

So if Jesus would not accept admiration, what would he accept? Worship.

Jesus would not allow himself to be a spiritual 'milestone' in a person's journey. He claimed to be the 'cornerstone'. He claimed to be the One and Only. He went even further than this, and said,

'Anyone who comes against this stone will be cut to pieces, and anyone this stone falls on will be crushed.' (Luke 20:17-18)

Have you come to Jesus fully? Have you finished your race, so to speak, passed by all the other milestones, and come to Christ as your arrival point, the finish line, the One and Only?

'Jesus Christ... the chief cornerstone.'
(Ephesians 2:20)

God changes things in our lives. This encourages me.

I do believe that the ultimate destination of heaven is what is *most* encouraging. Think about it. Leaving this life behind, with all its toil, decay, sorrow, regrets, fears, pain, hardship. *What release!* We're told that when the Lord comes again – or when we die and go to him – we will be **'caught up to meet him in the clouds.'** (1 Thessalonians 4:17) Complete release. And then we enter the gates of heaven to complete peace and perfection.

However, the amazing news about Jesus coming *here*, is that he brought power to us *now*. Power to change. His Holy Spirit in us and through us continues to bring change in people's hearts, lives, jobs, relationships, lands.

So when we lift our 'song' in praise to the Lord, in faith, we are bringing change into our lives, into our homes. I love worship music! I can't sing very well, but I can sing along. Worship, and believe. Bring change through your home through worship.

'While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came on Elisha.' (2 Kings 3:15)

'The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.' (1 Corinthians 4:20)

I struggle with insecurities. Sometimes a sunny day clouds over in my heart and mind, because I suddenly feel insecure.

In my case it is random feelings of insignificance. Sometimes it is triggered by a person, or a thought or feeling. I can't really get a 'grip' on the dynamic or the principles at work. It targets my sense of spiritual identity. Am I seen by God? Am I loved, or lost in a crowd? Does what I do make any difference, have real meaning?

This is a weakness, a thorn. I have asked God to take it away, but the vulnerability remains. He tells me that his grace is sufficient for me, and that if I walk through these moments (because they do pass) by his grace – just believing, not feeling – nothing is lost, his power pours through.

I'm learning. Bit by bit. I do see more now, and have more confidence in God's grace over the lie. I am becoming stronger as I exercise this 'grace walk' and my faith.

'I asked the Lord three times to remove the thorn, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast about my weakness, so that Christ's power rests on me... When I am weak, then I am strong.' (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

I feel it. I'm sure you do, too. Deep down we wonder at our purpose, our ultimate mission here on earth.

There are so many 'mini' missions (not unimportant), personal needs and natural goals – such as work, earning, providing, getting married, having kids, etc. And all these worthy responsibilities create more – such as repairs, relationships, health needs, grandchildren... Surviving life, and experiencing it a little, can consume almost all of it!

But then there are quiet nights, and lonely moments, where we wonder if this is all that life is about, working to live and living to work... And we know deep down this is not the case.

Jesus came to be '**God with us**', and to show us a better way:

'I am the way, the truth and the life...'

(John 14:6)

Jesus has given us permission, so to speak, to have a higher cause and mission than living life.

'Christ died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.'

(2 Corinthians 5:15)

Our truest, lasting mission, is building God's kingdom.

It is not 'unspiritual' to pray for God's protection on your life. I have sometimes struggled with this notion, because, well, I didn't really 'see' and understand the character and teaching of Scriptures.

Yes, we see in the Bible, some amazing people who faced into suffering and embraced it. We see amazing people do the same even now in our generation. Their faith takes them into and through a fire. But we also see and hear – when we look Jesus in the eyes and listen – that he teaches us to pray:

'... and deliver us from evil...' (Matthew 6:9-13)

Jesus himself prayed against evil and harm in our lives:

'My prayer is that... you protect them from the evil one.' (John 17:15)

It is not only OK, but the will of God, that we pray for protection from harm and evil in our own lives, and for others.

Be blessed and encouraged and active in praying for peace and blessing!

'I urge that prayers be made for all people... that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior...' (1 Timothy 2:1-3)

#21

Power!

Jesus gives us power. Power to change things on this earth. This takes faith. But this is where we as Christians can be world changers!

What comforts me is that God is moving now in victory, and sweeping the nations. He is taking back the world. I love this verse:

‘The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.’
(Habakkuk 2:14)

When I live my faith and share my faith, I often imagine it as being part of this ‘sweep’ across the world, like another stroke of paint on a big canvas that is being fully painted, and *will* be completed.

Remember, Jesus already has the victory (John 16:11) and all the authority both on earth and in heaven. (Matthew 28:18) Jesus also holds the ‘keys’ of death and hell. (Revelation 1:18)

So now we participate. We move the mission forward. We pierce darkness with light – the gospel of Jesus, his name, his Spirit. Step by step, day by day, through faith, prayer, worship, testimony... until we step through the gates of heaven!

‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ (Matthew 16:19)

God's grace is a 'Spirit space', beyond reason. Jesus died to open this space to you and me.

God's grace is his own self – limitless, pure, perfect, justified. And he walks you into this truth, through the 'door' of Jesus:

'Jesus said, 'I am the door. Anyone who comes through me will be saved, and he will go in and come out and find pasture.' (John 10:9)

We're saved, but then we move '*in and out*' and we find '*pasture*'. This 'world', this space in God, is grace. It is beyond the mind and reason of man. It is accessed through the death and resurrection of Jesus. You come to it through a tomb, through faith, not through learning.

It is freedom. In any given moment or circumstance of God's grace in your life, your day, your relationship... it is impossible to explain, impossible to justify. It is untouchable by people, places, your past, their words, your debts, your sins, your sorrow. It is freedom – true and without border – by the blood of Jesus.

'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.' (2 Corinthians 4:18)

I'm not talking here about perseverance generally – though I do need that! I'm talking about staying true to the Lord.

Strong and true advice when dealing with a 'hater', or someone that drags you down even subtly, is to take your eyes and mind off that person and move on. Right? Drop the calls, texts, etc., and distance yourself. Not just physically – which is important – but mentally. Stop thinking about them. Keep going...

But the same is true with 'flattery' or people and places of 'support'. We can also 'camp out' in places of comfort, when we need to keep moving. This is more about spirit than anything else. We sometimes 'give ourselves' to those who pat us on the back. And this is dangerous also. Because it could create a type of 'alliance' or 'partnership', that will hamper our integrity and strength in faith and mission.

'It is better to trust in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to trust in princes.' (Psalm 118:8-9)

Look carefully at this moment in Christ's life:

'Jesus... went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon went to look for him... he exclaimed, 'Everyone is looking for you!' Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' (Mark 1:35-39)

Have you ever felt like you're missing out? Like, the party, the gathering, is somewhere else... Sometimes it is more of a 'spirit thing' than even a physical event. Like, you might feel you're on the outside of a group or a vibe. Let me jump to the grand conclusion here: Jesus is there with you! I don't mean just because he comes to meet you there, but because he lived his life in that space.

'He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.' (Isaiah 53:3)

When you sit alone in your room, 'missing out', you're not alone, and you're not missing out. Jesus is there. That's who he is, and how he lived his life. He lived to be with the 'lost sheep'. He even left the 'found' ones to be with the lost one. (Luke 15:1-7) Missing out, is where it's at!

'Where can I go from your Spirit?... If I make my bed in the depths, you are there; if I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.' (Psalm 139:7-10)

Sometimes, the less people, the more intimacy with Jesus. You're never alone. You're never on the outside. You're a child of the King. You are where it's at because you are where He's at. Peace.

#25

Soak

We can change our minds by thinking about things, or learning things. We are actually called to do this:

'Be transformed by the renewing of your minds...'
(Romans 12:1-2)

And...

'Whatever is true... noble... right... pure... lovely... admirable... think about such things.' (Philippians 4:8)

But there is another way we 'change' and it is by *being* with the Lord, allowing his Spirit to soak into our spirit. This change is the most important. It does not only change *what* we think, but *how* we think; it does not only change what we see, but how we see...

'As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart...' (1 Samuel 10:9)

We are called to sit and 'be' with the Lord. This is a place of peace, moments of transformation. In this place chains quietly break, paths before us open and close, our hearts and minds move and 'become'...

'Be still and know that I am God.'
(Psalm 46:10)

We live our lives trying to be safe, secure, hidden, at peace. I often think that people, when they make a bit of money, move farther away from people (either by getting a bigger house, or getting a bigger yard), and they also use a bit of that money to put up a fence. These are not bad things at all, but they do show us our need, our drive, our desire for space, peace, safety.

When it comes to our identity, however, we often strive in the reverse direction. We strive to be seen, known, recognized, honored, admired. This is also natural, but I want to comment on where this can lead us astray.

Jesus – the most important, powerful and significant person to know – often *hid* his identity. He hid himself so that we would ‘see’ him. How? Why?

‘Being in very nature God... he made himself nothing...’ (Philippians 2:6-7)

Jesus made himself lowly so that we would not feel threatened, alienated, and even lose the relationship in the noise of ‘admiration’. He even told his disciples on occasion to *not* tell the people of his truest, highest identity.

There is freedom here for us. We, too, can rest. We can relax, and ‘fade’. We don’t have to make our truest self known all the time. We can disappear, and let others shine, and learn from them.

Jesus changes everything. When Jesus meets a person – or finds a lost sheep – he brings him into another world completely.

‘Jesus said, ‘I am the door. Anyone who comes through me will be saved, and they will come in and go out and find pasture.’ (John 10:9)

This is a picture of stepping out of one world, one reality, into a new world, a new reality.

Another powerful picture of this ‘change’ is captured in the prophecy about Jesus:

‘The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.’ (Isaiah 9:2)

Jesus changes not only what we see, but how we see.

When a person glimpses the truth of Jesus – ‘*God with us*’ – and they lift their eyes to him, they pass into a world – an eternity – of light.

‘The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.’ (Matthew 6:22)

God says you are unique. He calls you *'set apart'*, special. This is the truth of who you are in God, in the history of the world, the universe.

'Jesus said... 'I will give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.' (Revelation 2:17)

Now, people in this world may at times (or may never!) call you 'special'. You may come across 'praise' or even admiration. But the 'report' of people, although at times harmless and flattering, is flawed. It is tainted. It comes through the broken hearts and minds of mortal man. Jesus was wary of people's praise. An incredible verse notes this, just when the crowds were admiring Jesus:

'But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people... he knew what was in each person.' (John 2:23-24)

The first verse above – Revelation 2:17 – speaks of a name that Christ gives the faithful one, and it is known – only able to be known – by that person. It will be a deep-down definition, not with words, not with inscription. It won't be a name, an identity, that can be fully expressed (or it could be known to others, right?) Such is the name, the report, over your life – now and forevermore.

Let go and let God's truest name for you, fall on you like mist.

The glory of God – his light, peace, truth and life – is moving even now across the earth. It is taking back the earth, now that *'all authority in heaven and earth'* has been given to Jesus. (Matthew 28:18)

I often think about this. Truly. This image of God's glory moving throughout the world, a type of light or sun rising over the ocean and spreading out over everything, everywhere, often comes to my mind.

It gives me hope. It gives me a 'light' to be part of in my own life, as I share and live Jesus. I know I'm in this river of light, so to speak, being carried and carrying God's glory to its ultimate arrival, complete and eternal victory!

'The knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.'

(Habakkuk 2:14)

'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.'

(Psalm 24:1)

'The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.'

(Malachi 4:2)

'The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, ever-brighter until the full light of day.'

(Proverbs 4:18)

We are drawn to influential people – their popularity, their wealth, their beauty, whatever. One reason is quite innocent (though not ‘safe’, necessarily), and that is because their attention, the connection, makes us feel special, feel we’re ‘more’.

But another reason, I believe, is because influential people give us a sense of reaching even *more* people. We want to be where people are, or where ‘*it’s happening*’, because it gives us a sense of ‘reach’, of purpose, of movement in life.

Jesus did the opposite. He left the ninety-nine sheep to go find the lost *one*. The lost one was out on his own, at the end of the street, so to speak. There were no sheep beyond him, no connection ‘through’ him to others. He was alone and separate from the ninety-nine. And yet here Jesus ventured. This sheep he prioritized. And reaching him – the least of these, and the last of these – Jesus was fulfilled. In fact, we’re told, there is more rejoicing in heaven at this type of encounter, than at the many back in the pen. (Luke 15:7)

The ultimate prize of any influencer – either being an influencer, or being connected through an influencer – is to reach to the extremity of their connections. It finally stops at the end of the line, no matter how many ‘links’ before that point. And that last ‘link’, that person beyond whom there are no more, well, that’s the ultimate prize.

‘The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.’
(Luke 19:10)

Jesus is endless treasure. He's a 'man', but he's God. He is 'Arrival', but he is also a 'door' to new worlds.

'Jesus said, 'I am the door. Anyone who comes through me will be saved, and they will go in and come out and find pasture.' (John 10:9)

Jesus transfigures. You gaze on him the man, and as you gaze – because your heart worships – he transfigures:

'There Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.' (Matthew 17:2)

In Jesus, we're told, are hidden ***'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'*** (Colossians 2:3)

This is why we not only 'gaze' on Christ in our walk with him, but we 'seek'. We seek more. We hear his whispers and we ponder. We glimpse a revelation, and we peer into it. There's no end in God. And so when we have found him, we seek more of him, *in* him.

'One thing I ask of the Lord... that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and to seek him...' (Psalm 27:4)

I often wrestle with who I am. Insecurities make my soul slip and slide at times. I find myself searching in my mind for a 'footing' of identity.

I am reminded at times – by God's mercy and his whisper – that he is the God of 'existence'. He spoke, and the world came into being, was established.

'... God speaks, the earth melts.' (Psalm 46:6)

God's word defines. It defines matter, and it defines you and me. Your soul, your truest name, is in the palm of his hand. No circumstances, no report, opinion, reaction, question of mankind, can affect that. Of himself God said:

'I am that I am.' (Exodus 3:14)

Of you God says, '*You are.*'

Allow Jesus to speak your name over your soul. Allow God's Spirit to come on you with 'definition', with report, with anointing. As God is – pure, defined, without need of man's testimony or validation – so allow God to make you.

The key to this? Let go.

Even now, the truth is, who you *really* are (the 'good' report over your soul, the true one), is probably already upon you, even known to you. Believe. Receive from Jesus. Just be.

We often talk about '*more of God*'. Like, I need 'more of God', or there is always more of God to know, experience...

This sometimes makes me feel like there's more to *do*. It makes me feel a little tired, like I'm not done pursuing, chasing...

Jesus did not focus on 'more of God'. Jesus was God in the flesh, the arrival of God on earth. He brought completion, fulfilment, rest.

'Jesus said, 'Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest...' (Matthew 11:28)

Rest in the presence of Jesus. This is more the point, than the pursuit of 'more'. To rest in his presence – to '*be still and know*' – is to access 'more of God', God's way.

Paul wrote to the Christians and expressed his desire, his prayer for them, that they would experience more, but not as something up ahead or yet undiscovered. It was about knowing what we have in Christ, allowing Jesus who is with us, to really soak in, so to speak:

'I pray... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... and that you will have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ... this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.'

(Ephesians 3:14-19)

When I was a teenager I had chosen the world over Jesus. I was stuck in a life of sin. I say 'stuck', because it was caught up with people, not just activities or behavior, and people come looking for you when you try to walk away. They are a type of 'living hold' on where you find yourself.

I remember one summer I was away with my father on a trip. The Lord had begun convicting me of my sin. And it was on this trip the Lord revealed himself to me, and called me to repent, to **'come out from them and be separate.'** (2 Corinthians 6:17)

What was interesting, as I recall, is that my first instinct, and even effort, was to attach to a new group of people. I thought if I committed to a new, 'Christian' girlfriend it might give me a lifeline out of my social group when I return home.

Short story even shorter (because this was short-lived!), the Lord vetoed this direction.

If you feel called out of a life of sin, or a stronghold of people, the *'lifeline'* is Jesus himself, the path is humble repentance, day by day, encounter by encounter. It is not a flurry of new and 'other' activities or even church. Jesus – his blood, his power, his forgiveness – is sufficient to mark you, lead you, and change your world.

'Jesus said, 'Anyone who acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before the angels of God.' (Luke 12:8)

I knew a guy who once spoke about ‘givers’. He said some people know how to give, and some don’t. He was funny about it, but spoke truth. He said some people give you stuff and make you feel ‘terrible’ – or obligated. Others give and release!

Jesus instructed his disciples to give the gospel message – and healing power – to people ‘freely’:

‘Jesus said, ‘Proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.’
(Matthew 10:7-8)

Jesus himself gave himself in this way. He poured himself out. He poured himself *into* you and me:

‘This is the mystery of God revealed: Christ in you.’ (Colossians 1:27)

Jesus didn’t ‘confer’ on us a type of honor. No, rather, he ***‘became sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God.’*** (2 Corinthians 5:21) Jesus gave us life, and stayed behind to die.

Look at this word of Christ about his disciples, this Spirit of his giving, when the soldiers came to take him away:

‘Jesus said, ‘If you are looking for me, then let these men go.’ (John 18:8)

Bad guys can be caught in two ways: by people, or by God.

‘Jesus said, ‘Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ (Matthew 16:19)

We are called by Jesus to pray, and to be part of binding, and calling people to account. The prophet Jeremiah asked God to actually show him – let him see with his eyes, in his time – the punishment on those who had wronged him.

‘Forgive not their iniquity... Let them be overthrown... deal with them in your anger.’ (Jeremiah 18:23)

Jesus warned strongly, even severely, about punishment and judgment on those who sinned against the innocent:

‘Anyone who sins against one of these little ones, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drown in the depths of the sea.’ (Matthew 18:6)

About Judas, who had betrayed Jesus personally, he said: ***‘It would be better for him if he had not been born.’ (Matthew 26:24)***

It is OK to pray and ask God to punish the wicked here and now. It is OK to ask God to punish those who have hurt you, and to bring them to account.

We can lose sight of what something is worth. We can 'take something for granted'. Or someone. There are many moments in my own life, when I look back, that I wish I had been more 'present' with someone. I wish I had listened, looked them in the eyes, valued them more.

Two points on this:

- **This Happens with Jesus**: I say 'happens' because not only *did* people do this with Jesus 2000 years ago, but we do this – each of us – with Jesus today. His own brothers '*did not believe*' in him, and other people who saw him, touched him, received from him, turned their backs on him. Jesus told us that if we truly understand his forgiveness in our lives, we would love God deeply. (Luke 7:36-50)
- **Jesus Redeems**: My friend, the incredible news about the power of Jesus, is that he redeems our lost opportunities. He '***gives back our dead***'. (Hebrews 11:35) We all have lost opportunities that crush our spirits. Jesus, God in the flesh, by sacrificing himself for our sin and rising again to life, offers to move powerfully not only in our future, but through the corridors of our past.

'Jesus said, 'I am making all things new!''
(Revelation 21:5)

I have seen the world. From a young age I saw the disparities and poverty and wealth from the US to South America to Eastern Europe to Asia. Sometimes I find it hard to be present in my own world. I can find myself overwhelmed just thinking about other people's hardship, what they face into this day...

Two points on this:

- **Hope for Others:** This life is short – thank God! Truly, people's hardship here will cross a finish line. The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ – that God has come and will forgive and save – this is a lifeline for all. Even people in hardship can take hold of this rope of salvation, know God's power even now, and be on their way to heaven and great reward for their faith. ***'The last shall be first.'*** (Matthew 20:16)
- **Peace for You:** There is humility in receiving the good things – the good situation – you find yourself in today. ***'All good gifts come from God...'*** (James 1:17) Many times in Scripture God instructed people to not look this way or that way, to other people's 'lot' or even plight, but to receive what God was giving them, to rest.

'I will satisfy your desires in a scorched land.'
(Isaiah 58:11)

There is nothing in this life you will accomplish, and afterwards feel you're ready to 'sign off', go to glory. Here's how I know. Look behind you at the last years, and those other (great) accomplishments in life. Is there anything you've achieved so far that was 'enough' to say you had lived, and you could die in peace? No. And neither will there be up ahead.

GK Chesterton, author, once said, *'The best book I ever wrote, is the one I have not yet written.'* It's always the next thing, the next book, the next project, that will be 'the one'. But it never is.

So what can we live for? Well, honestly, nothing here on earth.

Jesus - God in the flesh – came to give us a reason to live, a legacy we can build. He actually gave us a project we can even now work on that will last forever, that will be revealed physically: the kingdom of God.

'Each one should build with care. No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light... the fire will test the quality of each person's work.' (1 Corinthians 3:10-13)

Believe in Jesus. Obey him. Walk with him. Share him. And so you build a true legacy.

Death is a mystery. Everyone goes there, and everyone goes alone. There is no one at the door of death that has been there, and accompanies you through – like a mentor or consultant. Everyone who surrounds you at the time of death, well, they are alive, and they have not yet gone this road...

Two points on this:

- **Never Die**: Jesus spoke an amazing word to those people – you included – who would believe in him. At first he says that when you die, you'll rise again. But then he drills even deeper and says, '***And anyone believing in me will never die.***' (John 11:26) You see, in Christ death is no longer what it used to be. He now holds '***the keys of death***'. (Revelation 1:18) Death may be a mystery, but in Jesus it has '***lost its sting***'. Dying in Christ, as a believer in Jesus, it's just not the same as 'death' the way we fear it.
- **Jesus with You**: Contrary to what I said in the opening paragraph, there actually *is* someone who meets you at the door of death, has been there, has come back, and will go with you through the curtain. So in human, mortal terms, we step through alone. But in the Spirit – which is even truer than those people we see around us – we do go accompanied to the next, most beautiful world!

'Jesus said, "Why all this commotion? The child is not dead but asleep." (Mark 5:39)

I wrestle with insecurity. In my case it manifests when I feel I'm not known or don't have the influence or importance I feel I need to have in a situation or a group of people. If I feel I know best in a situation, and my voice or 'influence' is not being recognized, I can feel insecure about myself, and about life around me.

Jesus shows me another way. He had the ultimate cause, and the power. He had the identity – God's Son – and the authority. And yet, when people did not defer to him, or recognize his place, he humbly stepped to the side and walked on. Sometimes the rejection was humiliating, but it did not disturb his Spirit or his path.

One time Jesus set out for Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead to prepare things for him in a Samaritan village. But the people in that village did not welcome him. His disciples wanted to '*call down fire from heaven*' on these people, for rejecting Jesus (and probably themselves, also). This is what Jesus said and did:

'Jesus turned and rebuked his disciples. Then he and his disciples went to another village.'

(Luke 9:56)

In Jesus we don't have to prove anything to anyone. We just need to keep our eyes on him, and keep in step with him. People's acceptance or rejection of our faith is not our battle to fight. Walk on...

At night I love to sit up in bed a while, in the dark, and wind down. I think. I wonder. But sometimes I pray... The truth is, in the very depths of our hearts and minds we can pray and change the world. Not only do we impact the world when we pray, but our prayers in faith actually 'build' an eternal structure of truth, our own inheritance, and the kingdom of heaven itself.

'Jesus said, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' (Matthew 16:19)

Your prayer to Jesus impacts people, paths, history and the very structure and 'build' of heaven.

'We are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building... If anyone builds on the foundation of Jesus Christ using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light... the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward...'

(1 Corinthians 3:9-15)

Faith is God's 'currency', his most treasured prize in the heart of a person. When you can, trade in worry and even wonder, for a prayer in faith for yourself, for others, and for your loved ones to come to know Jesus.

#43

Go Lower

How can I lift all these people?

When I speak to just one, I can encourage them. I feel strong to lift one. I can see in their eyes that they are a better person than I am. I can see in their eyes humility and strength, faith and endurance. I feel compelled and equipped and convicted and zealous to encourage them here! I can speak words, must speak words, to tell them of their victory, their worth, their prize in Jesus Christ. *Hold on! Hold on!*

'If you endure, you will reign with Christ!'

(2 Timothy 2:12)

When there is more than one, well, I can encourage two, four, six, even ten. But when there's more, and crowds grow, Oh Jesus, how can I lift this many?

'Go lower,' Christ says. Get deeper down, sit on the ground, kneel. Go lower and you will reach where all are, where *'all souls are mine'*, says the Lord. Go lower and you will reach, encourage, all I give you to encourage. This is where Jesus reaches you. This is the space of the Spirit, where you will hear my whisper, and it will become fire in your soul, in your words, and you will make it known to my loved ones, reviving souls and lifting hearts.

'Jesus made himself nothing...' (Philippians 2:7)

'Jesus became poor that you might become rich.'

(2 Corinthians 8:9)

Sometimes I feel less significant when I'm part of something 'big'. Like when I volunteer with a huge group of people, I feel my part fades, my presence is almost not needed.

You know, as a follower of Jesus the opposite is true. In fact, even in a large church event, each individual is much greater than the 'whole', so to speak. The reason for this is because Jesus is counting each person's faith, their heart towards God, their relationship with him. Your part is you. It is each individual that counts to Christ. The great work we are all doing, well, that work will one day disappear. That building, that project, that playground...

No one 'owns' Christianity, not even if someone owns a ministry. We invite people through the gospel of repentance and faith to meet with God alone. We usher people into the presence of the Lord. As a believer, every prayer you whisper, every moment you sit with the Lord, every act of faith – no matter if alone or part of a large group – it is your heart, your soul, you personally, that counts.

'Your Father in heaven who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' (Matthew 6:18)

'Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.' (Psalm 17:8)

If you have believed in Jesus, you have a 'living wisdom' inside of you. His Spirit lives inside of you. As humans we have so little understanding. We study and learn and research, but the truth is, our wisdom is 'foolishness to God.' And God determined that his highest 'wisdom' would not be known or found through our wisdom:

'Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him...'

(1 Corinthians 1:20-21)

Jesus is the word off the page. He is the 'Word made flesh'. (John 1:14) Jesus is all the wisdom of God – God himself – inside of you!

'In Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form.' (Colossians 2:3)

'This is the mystery of God revealed: Christ in you...' (Colossians 1:27)

So, my friend, trust the 'understanding' you have, that comes from Christ in you. It is higher, deeper, more living, than any scholar could write or academic could argue. The wisdom that lives in you – the Holy Spirit – is a higher wisdom than any peak on any building in any university!

"Not in wisdom... riches... strength... But let him who boasts boast in this, that he knows me,' says the Lord.' (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Sometimes I feel like I am seeing too much of God. What I mean is, I will realize I'm pondering, or meditating, out beyond words, really, more like gazing... Then I'll suddenly feel like I'm too distant from reality, and my connection with people. Like, I'll never be able to really communicate this sense of God, or this spiritual place... Sometimes I even 'snap off' my time with the Lord, like I'm drifting out to sea.

Paul once said that he was caught up in a vision so powerful that he really didn't know if it was a vision, or if it was an actual visit in the body to heaven. And he said that he *'heard inexpressible things'*, in other words, things that were not for him to relay to the rest of us. (2 Corinthians 12:1-4)

My friends, in knowing Jesus, you know the eternal God. God is spirit. (John 4:24) He has *'put eternity in your heart'*, and he himself is eternal. There is no limit on his presence in you. And what he reveals to you in Spirit – his love, his touch, his wisdom – you don't have to bottle it and relay it to others. Sometimes it is just an outpouring on you.

'I pray that you will have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.' (Ephesians 3:14-19)

As a Christian 'on mission', I sometimes find it hard to impact by degrees, or plant seeds. I'm more of a 'hard sell' guy, and I look for results. This is a weakness (often); yes, a strength in other ways, when led by the Spirit and in my zone. But I need to grow in this, and this is why...

God doesn't count *results* the way we do. It is so clear all through the Bible, story after story. Even Jesus would plant seeds with people, or let people walk away from him, or even tell people they were '*close to the kingdom*', and leave it there. He was at peace, and lived in step with the Spirit of God, with the Father:

'Jesus said, 'The Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.' (John 5:19)

No matter what your part – it is as significant as any part! Whether you walk a person through the door of salvation, or whether you pray one of the many prayers, or say one of the many kind words, that will light that person's path to that door of salvation, your role is equal to that of every other 'worker' in this mission. Eyes on the Lord – not even on our task. It is the Lord you work to, and it is only He who will say, ***'Well done, good and faithful servant.'*** (Matthew 25:23)

'He is kept in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on the Lord.' (Isaiah 26:3)

The Spirit Behind

Everything we refer to as integrity or authentic or true, refers to the spirit behind a thing. It is interesting that Jesus pointed people to the 'fruit' of a prophet in order to know if they were true or false. Not the words, not the actions, but the fruit. Good fruit either 'is' or 'is not'. It might look good, but be bad. It might not look great, but be very good. It's about what's inside, past the 'skin' layer visible to the eye.

'Beware of false prophets... By their fruit you will know them... A good tree cannot bear bad fruit...'

(Matthew 7:15-20)

Music might sound great, but the heart of the singer be one of envy and not worship. Words might flow from the pulpit in zeal and theological accuracy, but the speaker be a man of adultery and deceit.

People can 'name' God without believing or honoring him, hence the commandment to not do that. People can, in the name of Jesus, do miracles, and yet not know him. Should we fear the counterfeit? Should we be overwhelmed by the traps of deceit? No! By no means. But we should be 'free' in our spirits to be 'shrewd' – as Jesus told us to be – and look deeply past words, past appearances, for the ***'fruit of the Spirit'***:

'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...' (Galatians 5:22-23)

I find myself, at times, debating things in my head that are not 'real' in my personal life. The only 'reality' these issues actually have is the reality I give them in my stress, worries, thoughts.

It recently occurred to me that Jesus really only spoke to – or seemed to think about and address – issues and people and even politics that came to him personally for advice. And even then he shrewdly saturated the 'focus' with God's purposes, not man's:

'The Pharisees asked him, 'Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar?'

Jesus responded, 'Show me the coin... Whose image is this, and whose inscription?'

'Caesar's,' they replied.

Jesus responded, 'Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'

(Matthew 22:15-22)

Jesus did not speak to the healing of all people, but he did pray and heal those who came to him. Jesus did not give universal guidance to all people, but did speak to the path of individuals who came to him for guidance.

Let us keep in step with the Spirit, know Jesus and his Word, and listen to his voice for those that he brings us.

'All those the Father gives to me come to me, and whoever comes to me I will not turn away.'

(John 6:37)

Laws don't change a person. Even being 'law-abiding' does not change a person.

The Bible points out something so obvious, and yet usually so 'missed' by us, and it is this: Laws are just proof that we as people don't do those things naturally. In other words, if as people we naturally never lied, we would not need a law telling us not to lie. The law, therefore, is evidence, that we need to be told to stop doing what we naturally are inclined to do!

'I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law... I would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' (Romans 7:7)

Even if you obey all the laws, this only shows that you need laws to do what is right, because in yourself, without these laws, your hearts goes elsewhere. Keeping laws, obeying rules, although it is good to do, it does not mean you are 'naturally' a better person than any other.

The greatest value of all rules and regulations in a person's life, is if it makes that person humble to their natural state, and in need of a Savior for their soul. Paul writes:

'Through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God... The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in Jesus Christ, who loved me and gave himself for me.' (Galatians 2:19-20)

Sometimes I wonder. I wake up sometimes and feel I've invested very little in my faith, in the Lord. I feel like I've made very little difference, if any, to the work of Jesus in this world. *Do you ever feel low, disheartened, discouraged, when it comes to your faith?*

Jesus is so tender. He is so kind. He never condemns. He reminds us that every small act of faith will yield a 'reward'. He also tells us that small acts of faith – 'seeds' – continue to grow even after we plant them and have forgotten them.

'I tell you anyone who gives even a cold cup of water to someone in need, will surely not lose their reward!' (Matthew 10:42)

'Jesus said, '... A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how...' (Mark 4:26-27)

Jesus even notes things that we forget, and he will remind us of them, and reward us for them:

'The righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we...?'
The King will reply, 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.'
(Matthew 25:31-46)

My friend, be encouraged! Your inheritance is in the Lord's hand and will come to you. Rise this day. Walk on in faith. Your road in Jesus is steadfast!

People often talk about 'world peace', and coming together as one. The 'divides' in this life are interesting, when you stand back and consider. Every 'border' of every country is man-made – and has been shifted and redefined throughout history.

Here is a stunning verse and truth:

'For Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity... thus making peace.' (Ephesians 2:14-15)

Sometimes I imagine not going up over the clouds and looking down on the world as one, but descending under the earth, and even under the sea, where a sphere exists where the land and waters are one, a rich blue floor that extends all around the globe... Light gleams, and there are no walls... We are beneath foundations of limited structures, back to where the ***'earth is the Lord's and everything in it.'*** (Psalm 24:1)

'The knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.' (Habakkuk 2:14)

Paul was an apostle – which basically was a leader and teacher and evangelist, sent by God and not by man. Much like the prophets of old.

Paul was a scholar of the original texts of the Bible at the time. He not only knew the original languages, but he grew up in the ‘original’ country, culture, religion and temple. On top of this he was instructed under a known teacher, and he was a follower of all the rules and regulations.

Now, what does this Paul say about the value of all this incredible inheritance of learning and heritage?

‘Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.’

(Philippians 3:7-11)

‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ (Romans 10:13)

I was recently reading about Gladys Aylward, the missionary woman to China. (1902 - 1970) One thing that struck me in her most extraordinary life story, was her openness to the lead of the Holy Spirit. She literally changed directions, and embarked on this or that path, as the Lord led her. The apostle Paul was the same. On his travels, in the course of his calling, he had a dream which called him off this path and onto another. (Acts 16:6-10)

When a man said to Jesus that he would follow him anywhere he went, Jesus responded:

‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’
(Luke 9:58)

Jesus also told a Pharisee that in taking the next step of faith – faith in Jesus Christ – he would be ‘off the page’, so to speak. Jesus said:

‘You hear the sound of the wind, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’ (John 3:8)

Don’t hold too tightly to your path, your ‘identity’, your brand, your ministry. Let God lead everyday by his Spirit. On that final day, Jesus will tell you who you were really, and what you in fact accomplished.

‘To him who is faithful I will give a white stone with a new name on it, known only to the one who receives it.’ (Revelation 2:17)

This Scripture really says it all. It helps me stay grounded in my faith, my identity, and my 'readiness' to meet the Lord:

'Suppose you have a servant... Will you say to the servant when he comes in from working, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'?... Will he thank the servant because he did what he was supposed to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' (Luke 17:7-10)

Jesus is not demeaning the work or worth of a servant. Jesus was the one who lifted up the lowly, the humble. Jesus is not either taking away from his many promises of reward for those who 'serve' him.

In this teaching, this story, Jesus is freeing us from our own distracting and encumbering notions of self-importance. If we can hold our focus on the Lord, and live life to serve only Him, we will live free, and arrive free, in his courts. We will answer to only him, and receive a reward from only Him – for no one else can give eternal rewards.

When you believe in Jesus you enter a battle. Well, truth is you were in the battle anyway, but now you are on a 'side', with a cause, fighting for a particular kingdom.

Most of us join the army of Christ, having been rescued from a confusing, dark, dangerous battlefield of morals, relationships, no purpose, no direction. Others of us may have actually been fighting for another kingdom, literally 'persuading' people and calling people to a dark cause, an immoral way of life, dishonest gain, untruthful structures. One way or the other – rescued from the battlefield, or changing sides as an active soldier – we come to Christ and are suited up in armor to fight for his gospel, his name, his '*kingdom of light*'. It's not easy! The world resists this. But it is important to know that every swing of your sword in faith, advances the kingdom and nothing will prevail against its advance. Jesus said that not even the '*gates of hell*' would stop the advance of his kingdom. So don't be discouraged. Be at peace. Know the Lord through his Scriptures, and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit – *and advance!*

'Be strong in the Lord... Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood...' (Ephesians 6:10-12)

I encourage you to look up this passage in the Bible, and read about the 'Armor of God': Ephesians 6:10-18

I've learnt about 'investment' the hard way! Jesus said that the '*deceitfulness of wealth*' would choke the Word of God in some people. (Matthew 13:22) This has happened to me more than once. I've started businesses and jobs with a heart towards 'money' – or just world values and direction – and put these things above God in my life.

The particular instances I refer to above ended 'prophetically'. It was as if God had 'capped' them, because I had 'capped' God in my life. He was not going to be mocked. He had invested revelation in my soul, my life, and he was not going to allow me to prosper away from him. I now thank God for this! But I do have scars.

Jesus *is* our treasure. To be close to him *is* the prize. He is not a God we acknowledge and pay homage to, in order to get his blessing on those things we *really* want. No. He is the source of life's very heart beat, air, spirit, joy, holiness, eternity. He is the fount, the wellspring, the oasis. He is our reward, '***our peace***'. (Ephesians 2:14)

If you are blessed to know this – to know that Jesus is the Son of God – you, too, must hold fast to this inheritance!

'... your faith more precious than gold.'
(1 Peter 1:7)

'Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...' (Psalm 127:1)

Apollos was a man we read about in Acts 18. We are not told much about him, but we do know he had a ***‘thorough knowledge of the Scriptures’*** and that he used this learning to ***‘prove that Jesus was the Messiah’*** – i.e. the *‘Anointed One’*, or ***‘God with us’***. (Acts 18:24-28; Matthew 1:23)

Apollos would not have had the writings of the New Testament – about Jesus and his followers. He would only have had the writings of the Old Testament, and then personally known and spoken about the message and person of Jesus Christ. So when it says that he proved from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Savior of the world, he was proving this from the 39 books of the Old Testament, Genesis – Malachi.

We’re told that he ***‘vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents’*** on this topic, and that in doing so he was ***‘a great help to those who had believed.’***

The Old Testament Scriptures are full of wisdom, history and prophecy. But they are also full of promises of the Messiah and prophetic foreshadowing of the Messiah. Jesus put it this way:

‘If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me’ (John 5:46)

The truth of God is not truth, unless it comes to seeing, believing and acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, *‘the Word made flesh’*. (John 1:14) This is a strong statement, but one that Jesus himself made – and died for.

#59

Closer

You can be closer with God, if you want to. Do you want to?

I've known people who are close to the Lord. They are not people with *'thorough knowledge of the Scriptures'* (as was Apollos, Acts 18), nor very verbal about their faith (but usually strong, and surprisingly bold, to speak truth in the moment). They don't write devotionals!;) They are in real relationships with Christians and non-Christians, and enjoy them equally. They are humble. They are faithful. They always seem to 'live' their faith despite questioning it at times. They walk the walk, quietly, consistently.

Some people who preach and even do miracles in Jesus' name are not close to Jesus. In fact, they do not even *'know'* Jesus. (Matthew 7:21-23) Others who may appear distant, even *'last'*, have deep, humble hearts, faith like a child, and their inheritance in heaven is stunning. (Matthew 20:16)

Some prostitutes are *'ahead'* of Bible scholars. Some gang members are *'ahead'* of Bible teachers. (Matthew 21:31-32)

Some poor people are *'rich in faith'*. (James 2:5)

To be closer to God in real relationship, is the same as being closer to a friend in real relationship. Pretenses must go. Deep forgiveness from Jesus must be received. And deep love will flow.

In the story of Narnia, Father Christmas gives Peter a sword and a shield, Lucy a dagger and vial of special medicine, Susan a bow, arrows and horn.

God has given each one of us unique talent – or ‘spiritual gifting’ – to accomplish his mission in this world, spreading the gospel of peace throughout the nations.

‘There are different kind of gifts, but the same Spirit... different kinds of service, but the same Lord.’ (1 Corinthians 12:4-5)

These gifts are for the **‘common good’**. (vs.7) And these gifts are to **‘equip’** one another. (Ephesians 4:12)

My friend, these ‘talents’ that the Lord gives us, he calls us to ‘invest’. (Luke 19:11-27) Like any investment, the actual ‘yield’ or profit is not really in our control, but the responsibility to ‘invest’ is upon us. And when we stand before the Lord we are going to give an account not for what ‘fruit’ we saw or could count, but whether we were faithful to obey, and invest what God gave us to invest.

We can plant and water, but only God **‘makes things grow.’** (1 Corinthians 3:7)

What has God equipped you to do, to glorify Jesus in this world? Are you a servant-hearted person, and can help inside and outside the church? Do you have a gift of faith or mercy, to pray and speak into the lives of the hurting, as the Spirit leads?

#61

Holy Spirit

When this world fell to sin, the earth itself was marked by darkness, decay and death. We know that people were, but the earth was, also.

'... creation was subjected to frustration... creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay...'

(Romans 8:20-21)

As followers of Jesus we partner with Jesus in taking back not just souls of people, but the very land of creation. We pray not just that this or that man or woman might see, believe, repent and follow Jesus, but that his Holy Spirit might move and take residence in this or that home, this or that street, this or that plot of land. We want the light of God's righteousness to ***'cover the earth'***. We don't take people out of dark places, but rather we invade the whole space, people included, for eternal 'takeover' of souls and spaces alike.

Jesus spoke about when an impure spirit leaves a person or place, it first seeks rest, finds none and so returns to the person or the *'house'* it had left. It comes back to find an empty and tidy home. And so this impure spirit returns, with more unclean spirits than were originally there.

We are battling in faith not just to drive spirits to other places in this dark world or even spirit world. We are looking to take back ground – and the souls we find there – now and forevermore.

I used to hear people speaking of this or that person, who had a 'huge influence' on many people. I would wonder how you become a person like that, with lasting and reaching impact.

Well, the truth is, you don't become this person by trying to become this person.

There's only one person to 'follow', and that's Jesus. He made you. And he made you unique. Your truest 'self' comes to completion, comes to life, in your Creator.

'Jesus said, 'Anyone who believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within them.'

(John 7:38)

You are not called to be 'radical', or influential or to even leave a great name or legacy here on earth. You are called by Jesus to take your eyes off others, off your own destiny, to settle your weary eyes on him. Only him. Here living waters will refresh you. Here your truest self will rest, breathe, take root, and the Lord will lead you on your path, your story.

'And when you turn to the left or to the right, you will hear a voice behind you say, 'This is the way; walk in it.' (Isaiah 30:21)

There's a time to contend for our faith. To actually stand up for Christ, or stand against wickedness or the 'false'. Not easy. Can be a little unnerving, or scary. Jesus commends the church in Ephesus for doing this:

'Jesus said, 'I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false... You have persevered and not grown weary...' (Revelation 2:1-5)

The key to 'contending' is not to worry about contending! Jesus himself challenged us to not even worry about it in the most intense situations:

'Jesus said, 'You will be brought before kings and governors on account of my name. And so you will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.' (Luke 21:12-15)

As followers of Jesus we don't set out to contend. We follow Jesus and seek to 'lead' and testify and share. We walk closely with Jesus because we are loved by God, and grow in our love of God. Now, as the journey continues, and God fills us with his Spirit, his heart, his words, his mission, we may find ourselves on the frontline of an issue. We may come up against real opposition to the name of Jesus. We don't worry. We don't strategize. We simply stand with Christ, faithful and true.

Three verses about 'stars' come to my mind today, and I want to share them with you. There are many more, but let me share these three, with a simple note after each one:

'When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?'
(Psalm 8:3-4)

This Scripture I memorized when I was seven years old. It still comes to mind every time I look up at the stars at night.

'You shine like stars as you hold firmly to the word of life.' (Philippians 2:15-16)

Such a picture of light and influence! As you keep your eyes on Jesus and hold to his path, his Word, his name, you shine like a star!

'Those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars for ever and ever.' (Daniel 12:3)

This is a team effort, and the global mission of Jesus Christ. You might not think that you personally '*lead many to righteousness*'. Well, like a soldier in an army, no one wins the battle alone. If you simply whisper, '*Here I am, Lord*', and are willing to be part of the mission of Jesus to reach the lost, then you are part! And you are active! And you will shine like the stars for ever and ever!

Knowing God is not just about knowing verses about God. He is Spirit. He is alive. The Scriptures about God are like paths to God, like a short runway lifting a plane into the boundless skies.

Jesus is the 'door' to God and all things eternal. He puts it this way:

'I am the door, and anyone who comes through me will be saved. They will go in and come out and find pasture.' (John 10:9)

Jesus is the arrival point of truth, but he is also the 'starting' point of all truth. He is a 'door' to pasture.

From Genesis to Revelation we are lifted off the page. We read about God's holiness, but it is the Spirit between the lines that is actually Holy. We read about his heart, but it is the Spirit – the eternal Spirit – between the lines where his heart actually is. The Word points, the Spirit blows eternal.

Jesus said of the Pharisees that they searched the Scriptures for life, but would not come to Jesus to actually have life. (John 5:39-40)

Don't miss the Spirit of God's truth by fixating on the print of God's truth.

'So we fix our eyes not on the seen but on the unseen. For the seen is temporary, but the unseen is eternal.'

(2 Corinthians 4:18)

When God appointed Jeremiah as a prophet to the people, he told him that he would be opposed by all. That's a lot to hear when you're about 17 years old!

Now, one thing God did tell Jeremiah is this:

'Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall...' (Jeremiah 1:18)

Jeremiah did not strive to defend himself or even his status as a prophet of God. In fact, when his life was on trial – and another prophet had been executed already – Jeremiah simply told them to do what they felt was right to do, but he would not retract the word of the Lord that he had spoken, and which had offended them. His life was spared.

Jesus was the same. He often tried to actually *hide* his identity, rather than proclaim it. He was so secure in who he was in the Lord, and the Lord's purposes through him, that he did not need to ***'raise his voice in the streets.'*** (Isaiah 42:2) He knew that if anything of spiritual significance came against him, or came forth from him, it would do so in power, it would not return empty.

'Jesus said, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone... Anyone who comes against this stone will be cut to pieces, and anyone on whom this stone falls, will be crushed.'
(Luke 20:17-18)

I think of people of faith, true followers of Jesus, as lampstands in a dark world. I mean, Jesus said this of us, too. But I picture it in my mind like you in your neighborhood as a lampstand planted there, glowing in warm light even on a dark night. Such comfort. Such hope. And as these lamps are lit, and planted around the globe, light spreads more and more...

***‘Jesus said, ‘You are the light of the world...
People light a lamp and put it on its stand...’***
(Matthew 5:14-15)

You are connected to a unique number of people, and in a specific territory. Your faith in Jesus – your light and lampstand – moves in certain circles, and is seen, crossed, touched by certain people and moments.

Be at peace today. Sit quietly with the Lord, close your eyes, maybe listen – really listen – to a few worship songs. Whisper to Jesus that he – ‘he’ and not you – will go out before you today, even this season, and open doors and hearts for your light to reach people, to season the air, to push back darkness, to reveal Jesus.

Jesus leads. We follow.

‘Keep me, Lord, as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.’ (Psalm 17:8)

Do you ever 'feel' that you failed as a Christian? Do you hear a song or a word or message, and suddenly feel that you have not been strong in your faith, and a sense of loss or regret comes over you?

Good news! If you're not already dead and buried (*and I'm presuming you're not*), you can redeem everything! Yes, all lost years can rush back into this moment and you can stand up strong and true. Let's talk about this!

One account that impacts me deeply (*and there are so many like it in the Bible!*) is about the man who was crucified next to Jesus. This man's life was behind him now, with no way to change his course or make amends. No road up ahead, just a few short hours to live. He turned to Jesus and believed in him. He said to Jesus, '**Remember me.**' Jesus said, '**I tell you, this day you will be with me in paradise.**' (Luke 23:43)

But it doesn't end there. This man's story, his 'testimony', he never had a chance to share with anyone. He could not retrace steps and apologize to people. He just lifted his eyes with his last strength and sincerely believed in Christ. And yet his story has been told. His testimony has reached millions over the last 2000 years, and it continues. Lift your eyes to Jesus now. Let go of the past. Let him deal with that. You lift your eyes, look ahead, walk with Christ.

'I will restore to you the years the locusts have eaten...' (Joel 2:25)

#69

Why go back?

I have opinions. I have some 'clever' comments that occur to me... And I have lots of regrets from airing these things!

There have been times in my life when God has got me out of a 'topic' or issue. Like, I no longer need to think about it, research it, study it, and definitely not comment on it. And yet... I do! I was free, and then I entangled myself again!

'As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.' (Proverbs 26:11)

In fact, Jesus has sanctioned my freedom from so many concerns and worries, that I still concern myself with, and worry about. I'm freer than I know!

Jesus doesn't condemn you or humiliate you. But he does lead you out. He does open doors for you to exit. Are there some doors he has opened to you? Maybe some 'news' you don't need to be watching and thinking about? Maybe some world affairs that are not for you to even know about? Maybe some work matters, family matters, that God has said are not your matters?

Paul said to Timothy:

'No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer... Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.' (2 Timothy 2:4,7)

There is an economy that exists where people without money still 'buy' food and drink. That's right. They 'buy' – with all the dignity that comes with having wealth to acquire – but they buy without money.

'Come... you who have no money, come, buy and eat! come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.'
(Isaiah 55:1)

So there's a type of 'wealth' you can acquire, that will have 'purchasing power', but it is acquired through giving, not getting.

'Jesus said, 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.' (Mark 10:21)

Jesus did not call all of us to sell everything and give it all away. But he did warn all of us that a love of money will compete powerfully with a love for God, and steal our soul.

'What does it benefit a man to gain the whole world, and yet forfeit his soul?' (Mark 8:36)

If you receive money for something here, chances are that is your reward in that area. If you forgo certain 'rewards' and rights here, in order to advance the kingdom of Jesus, you are storing up for yourself reward in heaven.

#71

Devout

I find the word, '*devout*', a bit heavy. It reminds me of somber and austere people – who are wrong. A bit like the leaning tower of Pisa...

Truth is truth, whether it comes on strong or floats in the wind like a feather. It doesn't need 'devotion' from humans to validate it.

The Pharisees challenged Jesus saying that he was appearing as his own witness, insinuating that if no one is vouching for him, his testimony cannot be trusted.

'Jesus said to them, 'Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going.' (John 8:14)

When you see Jesus, and believe what you saw, his Spirit moves to live inside of you. You know Jesus is true.

The highest and most powerful position you hold as a Christian, is simply at the feet of Jesus. Seeing. Believing. Being.

'... but Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, listening to him... Jesus said, 'Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.' (Luke 10:38-42)

Do I Encourage?

I can be insecure. This is different from someone just being shy or quiet. Insecure means 'unsafe', like an insecure house or property. Now, if someone feels insecure, they try to make themselves feel secure, or 'safe'. They try to feel significant.

So if someone is controlling, well, they probably feel insignificant in their *real* levels of control in life. If someone is loud, demanding, well, they might feel insignificant in not really being noticed or heard in life.

Two very brief points on this:

- **You are significant!** No man or woman or child *is* insignificant in life, or 'unsafe' in that way. God shows no favoritism. He loves all, and created all. We can all stop trying to be important, because we are more important than we know.
- **Encourage others!** Do I encourage others? Do I show up and demand attention, trying to feel safe, secure? Or do I show up and reassure other people about who they are in truth?

'Consider others better than yourself.'

(Philippians 2:3)

'Speak only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs...' (Ephesians 4:29)

One of the markings of a cult is the organization's demand on you personally. Not so much what you believe, but your commitment to the organization.

John the Baptist was a prophet who was preparing the way for Jesus. How? By calling people to repent of their sin, and telling them the kingdom of God was near, at hand. His ministry was powerful, and Jesus himself said that John was the prophet Elijah returned. John baptized Jesus.

Now, when Jesus began to teach, preach, heal and make himself known, here is what John said to those who questioned:

'He must become more, and I must become less.'
(John 3:30)

The spirit of true Christianity is this. Paul says the same thing about himself, about Peter, about Apollos, in *1 Corinthians 3:21-23*.

My friends, this must be the mark of the 'local church' or ministry or faith group that you are part of. It must! If not, it is not lifting Jesus high enough. It is elevating people and 'self' too much!

And this must be your and my spirit. We must live this, where Jesus is higher than ourselves in our personal lives, and in our message to others. Even in the quiet, personal dealings with people as we instruct them in the faith. Do they leave with Christ as the prize in their soul, or do they leave with more of you, more of me?

When you consider the world around you, where do you see a need for the message of Jesus? Where do you 'feel' the need?

Once I lived in quite a rough neighborhood, with my wife and four small kids. One night our car was broken into by six young guys. I watched from the upstairs window, nothing I could do. Cops came and went, glass and car seats on the pavement. Later that same night I woke to a 'bang', and saw my neighbor's car engulfed in flames. My friends, as Christians, in Christ, we carry power of mercy and power of justice:

'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. Now what does the Lord require of you? To seek justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.' (Micah 6:8)

We're not called to every 'job' that we see needs doing. But we can impact every job site we see! We can pray. We can believe. We can decree, even demand that the power, the justice, the mercy of Jesus flows. We can 'loose' justice over a place or person, and 'bind' a spirit or person, in Jesus' name. We can ask God to send forth workers to a place, to a person, to a business, to a movement. We can bring about real change in the Spirit.

'Jesus said, 'Ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers.' (Matthew 9:38)

'The gospel is the power of God for salvation.'
(Romans 1:16)

#75

Tell me...

Where do you find yourself? What's your situation, your name?

Where do you live? Do you have neighbors? How are you doing?

What do you see out your window? Do you enjoy early mornings?

Who weighs on your heart? A neighbor, a friend, a son, a daughter?

Where do you walk? What stores do you pass through? How would you define and describe your community?

Truly, you are unique. God has put eternity in your heart! You are forever, and your place, your home, your story, your views, your feelings, your intuitions, your connections – these are so spiritual!

Allow Jesus to just fill you now. Let the Spirit of God touch you, refresh you. Sit with him. Let him fill you. Listen to him. Rest. Revive.

Your voice, your moment, your actions – seen and unseen – your faith, your song, your prayer, your sympathy, your kindness, your sorrow, your humility, your regret, these do touch people. And God bottles your tears. (Psalm 56:8)

We need you. Christ died for you. Your life here and now spreads the Spirit of Jesus, and we need you.

A 'mistake' can also be accidental. I'm not talking about that kind. I'm talking about that mistake - that thing you did that you knew you should not have done, and you regret to the core of your being. And the truth is, it was sin. Maybe now you find yourself in some situations as a result of that sin? Others may not know it, but you know it. Because one thing has led to another, and the knock on effect of running, trying to cover up or quiet your conscience, has just driven you further into gloom. Maybe even your job, or no job, is a result of this path?

'Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.' (1 Timothy 6:10)

'Folly is an unruly woman... To those who have no sense she says, 'Stolen water is sweet...' Her guests are deep in the realm of the dead.'
(Proverbs 9:13-18)

My friend, it's not too late! Truly, in Jesus, there is a 'door' out. There is a way home to your Father. There is forgiveness and even restoration. He can heal your heart, and even heal your land - your situation, your job, your health. The key is repentance. You must find a quiet place and be alone with God. You must allow his Holy Spirit to descend on you, and convict your heart. You must hear the knock on your door of Jesus Christ, and open it. It all begins here!

'Jesus said, 'I stand at your door and I knock...''
(Revelation 3:20)

Open Before You

When I was a kid I lived on ships for four years. I have a clear, windy memory of often standing on the bow when we were at sea, and looking out over the open ocean as the ship cut through the waves. Not even the ship I was standing on was in my view, just the open seas out ahead as I moved through them...

Your story is open before you. There is God, and there is you! You have no role or expectations to fill. You have no 'personality' or parent to live up to. You need no one's approval, and you owe no one your approval. Your own insight and discernment, in Jesus, are strong, true, valid. Walk in faith, and write your own story on the open heavens, on the days out ahead of you. Let history follow behind, but you look ahead. Let Jesus move through you, and cut a new path out before you.

'Jesus said, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.' (Matthew 8:22)

Eyes on Jesus. Listen to him. Walk. There will be Christians who doubt you, let you down. There will be non-Christians who doubt you, even oppose you. Eyes on Jesus. Sit with him. Allow his Spirit to you, through you. Listen. Walk.

'Who are you to judge another man's servant? Before his own master he will stand or fall. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand!'
(Romans 14:4)

The Garden of Eden (Paradise on earth) had boundaries, a border. When mankind sinned - disobeyed God so that they could *'become like God, knowing good and evil'* - God put them outside the Garden. We were made to live in Paradise. We were equipped in heart, mind and body for the 'environment' of heaven. In losing our land we lost life itself, and we lost the protection of the mind and heart. We now grapple with things mentally and emotionally that we were not made to think about, feel, experience. We are fish out of water in all aspects of life: ***'How can anyone understand their own way?'*** (Proverbs 20:24)

It is very important to understand this! To understand that we don't and can't understand! A fish out of water sees things and 'thinks' things that it was never meant to see, never meant to understand, and can't even live in that space, and so dies. As do we!

God has provided us his grace, to get us through. This is his very Spirit. He has not given us answers or understanding. Jesus died, rose again, and bought us back with his blood. And the healing balm he pours on our minds, our souls, as we make our way back to heaven, is his grace. Not every 'thorn' is removed; but for every thorn there is grace that is sufficient, even triumphant.

'I asked God three times to take it away from me... but he said, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'
(2 Corinthians 12:9)

I was weary one evening. Tired all day to the point of concern. But in my heart I knew I was just burnt out, had a very busy season mentally, practically and spiritually. I lay in bed that night, starting what can sometimes be a long wind-down before I sleep. The Lord suddenly brought to my mind three previous dreams I had, long-lost dreams. Each had a theme that related to the other. I knew Jesus was speaking. When I fell asleep I had another dream that was like the missing piece, again, related to the other three.

'The Holy Spirit will teach you all things, and call to your mind things I have spoken.' (John 14:26)

I'm not sure what those four dreams really mean. I'm not clear, exactly, why they were recalled to my mind. But I was clear that Jesus was speaking, his peace was tangible, his Spirit refreshing my weary soul.

Jesus is higher than your dreams. His Spirit speaks more purely than your heart. The Lord grants you peace that ***'passes understanding'***. He speaks directly – not always with words, but by his Spirit. Everything you have ever known about the Lord, all promptings and prophecies and dreams and words and Scriptures, well, Jesus is higher, and is with you still, with you now, with you afresh.

'And when your heart condemns you, God is greater than your heart and knows all things.'
(1 John 3:20)

Moses was called by God to be a leader of many people. Moses didn't want to be, nor did he feel qualified to be. His qualification? His anointing! God said, 'You are a leader'.

Most leaders you know tend to fight for their role. They've worked up to it, and they keep a shrewd eye on it. They contend for it, argue its case. Not Moses. In fact, one time a band of about 300 people challenged his leadership in a classic manner – ***'Why do you think you are better than others? What makes you so special?'*** (Numbers 16:3)

Moses pleaded with them not to do this, because Moses feared they would offend God. Moses himself wasn't offended. In fact he pleaded with God not to punish them for this. But God did. Severely.

You are unique to God. He calls you by name. You are set apart – special – not because you are superior to others or more righteous, but because God has set you there. You have a unique role in your community, in the 'world', but you also have a unique role amidst other Christians. Just be at peace. Rest. Allow God's Spirit in and through you to flow, to smile, to listen, to speak, to act.

'Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.' (Psalm 17:8)

The whole point of the Bible – of the histories from Genesis to Revelation, the miracles, the foreshadowing, the prophecies, the life and suffering of Jesus – is so that you and I can know God personally.

It is relational. It is not something we can simply sign up for, or gain through a class and a ceremony. It is a heart connection between you alone, and God alone.

Jesus said, ***'I am the door, and anyone who comes through me will be saved.'*** (John 10:9)

Jesus called us to turn away from our sin, and turn to him. He wanted this to be the same 'turn'.

In a quiet moment in the depths of your soul, you can turn your life and spirit and soul over to Jesus. You can pass through God's 'door'. You can be saved.

Are you saved?

And as we walk with Christ, we can bring others closer to him. We may not always meet someone at the threshold of the door of Jesus, but we can encourage, pray, speak, act, to bring people nearer and nearer to the kingdom, to the moment of seeing and knowing Christ.

'Remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.' (James 5:20)

People are 'gifted' differently – one with a gift of mercy, of service, of speaking, of wisdom, and more. And people are *blessed* differently.

A spiritual gift from God is a type of ability that comes more naturally to one than to another. It is an anointing to operate in that area. It is a 'gift', and should be enjoyed – like any gift. But it is also a responsibility, and a calling to serve others in the body of Christ, to build them up. Your gift is *through* you, *to* others. King David even saw his 'throne', his kingdom, as something given to him ***'for the sake of the people'***. (2 Samuel 5:12)

In the same way that spiritual gifts from God are for the building up of others, so, too, are blessings.

'Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.' (Luke 3:10-11)

'Command those who are rich... to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.' (1 Timothy 6:17-18)

Has God blessed you in a special way? Is there a blessing of protection on your life, your land? Is there a blessing of health on your body, your loved ones? Is there a blessing of provision, resources, on you? Thank God for this blessing, and enjoy it! But also ask the Lord today how his blessing on your life might pour through you – like a flowing river – and extend to bless others.

Have you ever set out to start on a project, and then you find someone has already got things going? You arrive to find the work underway? It's such an encouragement!

Long before a plot of land is even ploughed or the soil considered and prepared for cultivation, many people have worked together to clear the land. Tree by tree, hauling away the brush, in the wind, the rain... weeks, maybe months? When seeding is possible, mountains of work has already been done. When harvest is happening, well, almost *everything* has been done!

When I speak to someone about Jesus, I am aware that many of them already know much about him. There has been – there must have been – people teaching or speaking or modeling and praying for this person. I don't know those people, but the Lord does. I don't know what they've done nor what they sacrificed to 'clear this land', but the Lord does.

We see and quantify what we consider the harvest – the number of members of our church, how many 'hits' on a website, devotionals sold, videos watched. But Jesus sees and 'numbers' and rewards differently.

'Your Father in heaven who is unseen, sees what is done in secret and will reward you.'

(Matthew 6:18)

'Jesus said to his disciples, 'I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.' (John 4:38)

Jesus has revealed himself to you. You believe in Jesus, because you 'see' him. There's no other way. You see and you know.

You might not know 'how' you know, but you *do* know. Deep calls to deep.

'In your light, Lord, we see light.' (Psalm 36:9)

We have different paths that led us here, but this place – this place of seeing and knowing Jesus – is always the same arrival place for all who know. And the way we do know is by his Spirit.

'The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.' (Romans 8:16)

This is a place of complete truth. God's Spirit tells your spirit that Jesus is.

God brought us here. We must allow this revelation to sweep over us, to be upon us. His name is Jesus.

'For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.' (2 Corinthians 4:6)

'Deep calls to deep...' (Psalm 42:7)

My kids sometimes ask me if my wife and I plan to live in our current home for our whole lives. They like the idea of permanence or stability. It makes them feel secure. This is always clear in the conversation, so I'm careful how I answer.

Jesus told us that we could '*store up for ourselves treasure in heaven*'. This is an amazing teaching! It is an account – a savings account – that each of us has. Are we depositing? And what goes into this account will never lose value, and what it 'purchases' – a castle on a hill in heaven – will never decay or decompose.

'Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven...' (Matthew 6:19-20)

If I knew I could lay golden bricks in an eternal structure for myself even now, while living here on earth, I would be looking for those opportunities.

'No one can lay any foundation other than... Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is... fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward...' (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)

Ask the Lord today to give you a vision of where and how – with freedom and peace – you can build on your faith in Jesus Christ.

Don't just weather it!

You are called to believe Jesus. Not just his words about himself, but his words about you. Not just his truths about his unique identity and calling, but his truths about your unique identity and calling. This takes faith. This is living by faith and not by sight. So what do we do about some of those lies and cobwebs of untruth?

'...let us throw off everything that hinders...'
(Hebrews 12:1)

This next Scripture always struck me. Paul, such a Spirit-filled man, actually *'shook'* a snake off his hand. He threw it off, he didn't pray it off. Some stuff in our lives – accusations, feelings, fears – yes, even some of that emotional stuff, spiritual stuff, we can, and have the power, to shake off into the fire.

'Paul shook the snake off his arm into the fire, and suffered no ill effects.' (Acts 28:5)

Maybe you need to stand up, take your eyes off people (including yourself), lift them to Jesus, and speak back to him what he has already spoken to you!

Maybe some of these lines you should be speaking out loud, in faith?

I am not insecure! I am not afraid of him! Yes, I actually am different! Yes, I actually am 'set apart' from these others here! I am skilled! I am anointed! I am gifted, and ready for this! I have a 'true' word, and God has set me here for this!

Our words and our spirits are not naturally aligned. Not anymore. This is why Jesus had to admonish us to let our **'yes be yes, and our no, no'**. (Matthew 5:37) Why? Because our 'yes' is not necessarily 'yes'...

Words can state one thing, while the truth moves in a different direction, the actual 'spirit' of a thing. The truth is where the spirit is, not the words.

Jesus said some supposed 'Christians' would be doing Christian ministry – even healing in his name – but not actually know Jesus. And he said he would tell them, **'Depart from me!'** (Matthew 7:21-23) Jesus cares about the heart, not about the actions or the Christian accomplishments, not even in his name. He cares about where your heart is, and the spirit behind your words, not the words.

This is true about you, but also about those around you. And this is why you need discernment. A Christian leader – or local church – could be saying the right things, even doing powerful things, but the heart of the ministers might be far from God, or not know him at all. Their true motive might not be building God's kingdom, but their own empire. If this is the case, walk... You won't be able to prove this, but you will be able to discern this.

'The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts, except their own spirit within them?'
(1 Corinthians 2:10-11)

Some people would get close to Jesus, but not close the deal. For example, the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10. After a short discussion with Jesus about inheriting eternal life, he realized that his money came between him and God. He could not part with it. We're told, 'he walked away sad.' (Mark 10:22)

Jesus described some people as '*close to the kingdom*', and he said of others that they '*enjoyed the light for a time*'. (John 5:25)

Sometimes it is a matter of trust. I have spoken to people who truly enjoy the words of Jesus, the promises and his Spirit, but they feel that there is a part of themselves Jesus could not deal with – such as their sexual orientation. I have seen people 'walk away sad' because they cannot part with – or trust Jesus with – a part of themselves.

It is important to know that the gospel of Jesus Christ, his message of repentance and faith, comes in power! It is not just words, or something we agree to in our minds. It is the very Spirit of God coming into our souls, and with him we die and rise again to new life.

If you trust Jesus with your 'everything', and do not '*walk away sad*', he will transform everything. His power is far beyond your strongholds. But you must stay, hold steady, not leave. You must let him in fully.

'Jesus said, 'I stand at your door and I knock. If you open the door I will come in and dine with you.' (Revelation 3:20)

Sometimes I find it hard to get up in the morning. I'm not talking about the weather, but about inspiration. I mean, I'd get up anyway. I'd pour coffee, get ready, go to work... But sometimes those responsibilities and very necessary commitments, are not inspiring me. *Can you relate?*

You know, Jesus came and called us to work for him. An amazing parable is the '*Workers in the Vineyard*'. It speaks of a landowner finding people '**doing nothing**' in the marketplace, and giving them something to do, and paying them for it. (Matthew 20:1-16)

In Jesus we have not only been forgiven, saved, and promised life after death. We have also been 'hired', given an amazing, inspiring 'job' to do – build the kingdom of God.

Sometimes, my friends, this 'vision' is the only one that really inspires me. Not all the time, but sometimes. If nothing else, this day, I can see more of Jesus, and bring Jesus to another.

I start by asking to 'see' more of Jesus. I start with a time alone with him, to peer deeper into his Spirit.

'Deep calls to deep...' (Psalm 42:7)

Then I pray. I ask Jesus if he will guide me – navigate my boat, so to speak, in his living waters – to a Spirit-led moment of word or deed to bring someone closer to him.

Envy is at the core of sin. The tipping point of mankind turning against God, was when the serpent – the tempter – said to man and woman (Adam and Eve) about the forbidden fruit, ***‘God knows when you eat from it... you will be like God.’*** (Genesis 3:5)

Cain was jealous of Abel. Saul was jealous of David. Judas was jealous of Jesus. And even Paul, the apostle, was surrounded by people preaching Christ out of *‘envy and rivalry’*.

The target of envy is identity. We wanted God’s. This moment of not trusting God with the identity he had given us – knowing that it was enough, it was spiritual, beautiful, unique, equal to all others – is the moment sin and death engulfed us, destroyed everything.

And we allow this rush of darkness in ourselves towards one another, today.

‘Anger is cruel, wrath overwhelming, but before a jealous man who can stand?’ (Psalm 27:4)

If you struggle with envy of others, ask God to release you of this. Repent of it, and ask God to take it away.

If you are aware of the ‘pressure’ of envy *from* others, don’t fear it. It has no power to touch you, or to take identity from you. Take your eyes off it, place them on the light of the Lord, and walk on in the fullness – and gifting and authority – that God has given you!

Counterfeit Christianity stresses me out. I'm not talking about people who just differ from me in ideas or disciplines. I'm talking about cults (Jehovah Witness, Mormon), and Christian churches that are harboring sin (like a pastor who is committing adultery, or leadership that is affirming homosexuality). These things are 'wayward', and yet these organizations profess the name of Jesus, and claim to believe the Bible.

'They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.' (Titus 1:16)

'Priests do violence to my law... they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean...' (Ezekiel 22:26)

However, I say all this just to say... that my stress is not OK! Sometimes, even in the midst of corrupt activity, the Lord brings forth truth.

'Some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry... But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.' (Philippians 1:15-18)

The gospel bears its own power, despite the broken vessels it comes through. I need to let go, and let God. I need to keep walking, worry less about the 'false', and concern myself with being true, and doing what God has called *me* to do!

When I was younger I was always a bit mystified by adults talking about ‘years *flying by*’. They would look admiringly at youth, longingly. To me the years felt so long, so slow!

Let’s just say, now I understand. Look what Moses wrote about life:

‘Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.’ (Psalm 90:10)

In Jesus Christ we have no fear of this life passing. In fact, the passing of this life is to only leave the ‘trouble and sorrow’ behind, and cross over into paradise, to eternal youth, beauty and joy.

So having said this, take some time (not just now, but often), to stop and gaze at the approaching light. With every minute you draw nearer to the ***‘kingdom of light’***. (Colossians 1:12)

‘Do not give up meeting together... and encourage one another... as you see the Day approaching.’
(Hebrews 10:25)

#93

True Hope

Provision is a good thing. God provides for people and animals. Jesus himself told us not to worry about what we would eat, drink and wear, not because these things don't matter, but because they *do* matter to God and he will provide. (Matthew 6:25-34)

However, as humans we go too far in our relationship with 'stuff', with provision. Let's get it all in one category, by calling it 'money'. We go from receiving and valuing God's provision of money, to focusing on money, clinging to it as our security, our 'hope'.

'Command those who are rich in this world [you, me] not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.'

(1 Timothy 6:17)

What you have, you can enjoy! (*read above verse again*) But don't put your hope in it. Don't look to wealth to satisfy or make you safe. Don't look to this life to fulfill or protect. Don't 'hope' in what you have - or can get - in this life.

Jesus said, ***'You cannot serve both God and money.'*** (Matthew 6:24)

Belief is everything! Think about it. If you know someone, but don't believe in them, the relationship is nothing. Belief is love. Love is belief. Belief consummates truth. If something is true, but you don't believe it, then you don't act on it. Belief connects people to truth about life, and allows people to live it! Belief becomes faith when you act on belief. Jesus called us to 'follow him'. This is very different to just watching him, listening to him, even respecting him. There is a 'cost' to following, there is action. This is the 'belief' Jesus was looking for. This is, my friends, the 'belief' an employer is looking for, a cause, a school, a neighbor, a friend. Belief is everything. And if God calls you a 'warrior', but you don't believe him, then you don't receive this identity, it doesn't land. Truth is nothing, if not believed!

Jesus said to the Pharisees, ***'If you do not believe that I am he, you will surely die in your sin.'*** (John 8:24) Jesus was not asking for them to muster up some kind of 'belief' that they truly did not hold. He was asking them to acknowledge what was standing before them and what they could see. Jesus also challenged us to actually open our eyes. Sometimes we don't see, because we don't want to really look at what is before us, what we know in our heart to be true. Jesus said,

'This people's heart has become hard... they have closed their eyes.' (Matthew 13:15)

Were You Afraid?

People have power to abuse people. And we use it! There's nothing 'strong' or 'powerful' about it. A bigger person uses their advantage over a smaller person. Bigger in stature, wealth, intelligence, social standing - none of which we 'deserve' more than others, and all of which we will answer for to God:

'What do you have that you have not been given? And if you have been given it, why do you boast as if you had not?' (1 Corinthians 4:7)

'Jesus said, 'From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.' (Luke 12:48)

If you have ever been abused, and made to feel afraid or humiliated, you are not weak or a coward! You did not 'fail' by not defending yourself. Anyone can inflict this abuse on another, and everyone can be a victim of it and be frightened, humiliated.

Let Jesus lift your head, today. Let him heal you. Let him define who you really are - strong, new, defender of the weak, humble, free, destined, on a new path this day!

'Do not be afraid - I will save you. I have called you by name - you are mine.' (Isaiah 43:1)

There's an interesting story in Acts chapter 8 about the apostle Philip meeting the 'Eunuch', the Treasurer of the '*Queen of the Ethiopians*'. I won't go into the story, but want to note something that this story always brings to my mind:

What do we know about this 'Queen of the Ethiopians', or any of the people that this Treasurer was part of? *Nothing*.

Of that empire, so to speak, we have mention of one man, the 'Eunuch', who sought God and found him. (Acts 8:26-40) All through the Bible we see this again and again. Jesus picks out one person in a crowd and speaks to them, one man in a sick commune and heals him, one lowly, uninvited woman at a high end dinner party, and honors only her.

The 'big thing' to God is not the conference, the crowds, the noise. It is the quiet stirrings of the individual heart, *your* heart.

'Jesus said, 'I stand at your door and I knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and dine with you.' (Revelation 3:20)

The son of a king - the prince - has the king's ear. Well, he actually has the king's *heart*, which is beyond influential. Jesus told us to pray and ask the Father, God in heaven, for what we needed, in *his* name - the name of Jesus: ***'Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.'*** (John 16:23)

The love the Father has for the Son - the love God has for Jesus - is not separate to himself. Jesus is one with the Father, and their love is bound up together in the very existence and essence of God. And *you* are known by Jesus, you are loved by Jesus. You honor the Son through your faith in him, through your walk with him: ***'Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.'*** (John 5:23)

And my friends, the line of influence carries on - to and through you! Jesus said that anyone who honors *you* - as a true follower, and 'son' of Jesus - will also be honored by God. Your 'direct line' to the Father, to Jesus, is very important in the lives of others. You are 'connected', and your prayers, your faith, can truly bless others!

'Jesus said, 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.' (Matthew 10:40)

When the Titanic struck the iceberg, no one initially thought much of it. But it was a 'death blow'. It was over. Two hours later the ship was under water, with more than 1500 people lost.

The Bible tells us that the same happened in the time of Noah and the flood. People were acting like nothing was happening, until it was too late. You see, when God decrees that something has happened, it has happened.

'When God closes a door, no man can open it.'
(Revelation 3:7)

And now it is simply a matter of time. There is no more question of the outcome.

When Jesus died on the cross he declared, ***'It is finished!'*** (John 19:30) Darkness, sin and suffering in this world, is finished. It is defeated. It is judged. This is not in question. Jesus stated: ***'The prince of this world stands defeated.'*** (John 16:11)

My friends, when you share Jesus, and pray Jesus, into a person's path, into their home, their street, their land, you are dismantling the fortresses of the enemy. He is already defeated, and you are removing bricks and letting light - victory light - flow in.

And some of those bricks you remove, or blows you deal in faith, may not initially look like much, but they could be 'death blows' to pockets of resistance and darkness. So do not grow weary! Do not give up!

God speaks through people. He made people in his image, and he speaks through them to each other.

People are so spiritual, so essentially 'of God', that God speaks through people - truth and goodness - when people don't even realise it.

Paul quoted non-Christian writers, to proclaim God's truth:

'As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' (Acts 17:28)

God spoke through prophets, disciples, kings and queens, and we have these Spirit-filled words in the Bible. God also speaks through you and others.

God also 'speaks' through nature:

'Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen... from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.' (Romans 1:20)

God speaks through people, and so we do need each other. And God speaks through creation - it testifies to his presence, his person, his power.

'The heavens declare the glory of God... day after day they pour forth speech...' (Psalm 19:1-2)

Some ministers and ministries out there, are not true. Paul writes that **'many... peddle the word of God for profit...'** (2 Corinthians 2:17) 'Many', not 'some', not a few here and there.

Again, Paul warns Timothy that there are a **'great number of teachers'** just telling people **'what they want to hear'**. (2 Timothy 4:3) A 'great number'!

So we must be shrewd in what we support. Having said this, we must not use this as an excuse to *not* support God's true causes and mission.

'How will people hear the gospel unless someone preaches to them? And how will he preach, unless he is sent?' (Romans 10:14-15)

Don't worry about those ministries you are not sure about. But do ask yourself about those ministries you are sure about. There are some people out there doing great work - work in Jesus' name that you *do* care about. Are you in a position to support them financially? Has God been prompting your heart to give?

A wise man once said to me, *'Either support those people doing the work you believe in, or be prepared to go do it yourself.'*

You can't support every cause, but there may be one or two that the Lord is calling you to pray for, and give to. Pray about it!

Some things in life - the most important things - cannot be proven. Love, joy, hate, happiness, jealousy, sorrow, spirit, soul, compassion... Basically everything spiritual, and really anything that not only is part of life, but gives meaning to life. These things you can choose to believe exist, and allow to be part of your life and understanding of the world. Or you can deny they exist. But you cannot prove or disprove them. Science does not prove anything. It studies things that are provable. It analyzes what has been created; it does not create. Now, it can create in the same way a child might create something out of Lego. The structure may never have existed prior to the little guy's invention, but all the pieces were there already.

The only thing God really set out to 'prove' in history was his love. Much like a parent with their children. They don't spend much time trying to prove they are the parent, but they do invest in trying to prove their love and care as a parent. When Moses asked God what name he could give the Israelites, by way of proving it was God who sent him, God said: ***'Tell them, 'I AM' sent you.'*** (Exodus 3:14)

God is. He stands above and separate to 'proof'. He will be seen, if sought. But he will not be reduced to the reason of the little mind he created. (see *1 Corinthians 1:18-21*)

Here is the real truth that God *did* want to 'prove' to us, and longs for us to believe and receive:

'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us...' (1 John 3:16)

#102

Robbed

Life is short. Some people have had terrible experiences. Is this you? Do you feel that you were robbed? Do you have scars that weigh you down, disturb your sleep, suck joy out of experiences that should be light, should be uplifting?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a 'message'. It is God's '*power to save*'. It is a wind of healing. It is not bound by time, and it will reach back into your past and eradicate all loss, all pain, all sorrow.

'The gospel is the power of God for salvation.'
(Romans 1:16)

The Bible speaks of Jesus '***making all things new***' - not just restoring, patching up. God promises a '***new heart and a new spirit***', not just a rescued heart or redeemed spirit. The gospel is about dying to the old, and rising to a new life.

'Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come!' (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Hang in there! Jesus '***became sin***' for you, to release you of not just the effects but the very history of sin upon your life. Impossible to understand - so we believe! We receive! Hang in there and you will not only be fully saved and know the fullness of life, but you will 'reign' over life itself!

'If we endure, we will reign with him!' (2 Timothy 2:12)

Have you ever been inside somewhere, warm and dry, while a storm rages outside? Or have you ever found yourself in a dangerous situation, and then escaped it, down a back alley or by friends arriving?

You know, in heaven there won't be this experience. Some people won't be 'sheltered from a storm', while outside others are caught in it. No one will need to be 'saved', because *all* will be safe, all the time.

'There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.' (Revelation 22:5)

But here on earth, my friends, this experience of getting safe, being saved, being sheltered from the storm is very real, and the actual call of God to people:

'Jesus said, '... the rains came down... the wind blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.'
(Matthew 5:25)

In Christ there is a peace and safety that covers you. New, eternal 'boundaries' fall around you, around your heart, around your 'land'. You will see blessing on your actual reality here and now, but most importantly, when all is said and done (and gone!), your eternal inheritance will come into view.

'Lord... you make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.' (Psalm 16:5-6)

Sometimes I've worked really hard to convince a person about Jesus and his truth. Honestly, there is a time for this. Even Apollos ***'vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents... proving that Jesus was the Messiah.'*** (Acts 28:18)

However, the real 'key' is that we are in step with the Spirit, and doing - or saying - what God is doing and saying. Jesus himself said he could only do what he saw the Father doing. (John 5:19)

If I am *'vigorously refuting'* someone, when the Holy Spirit is prompting me to gently and simply 'testify', or just stand with Jesus, identify with him, well, then my efforts to 'convince' will bear no fruit. Why? Because that is not what the Spirit was doing. I was in the wrong river, so to speak, the wrong flow.

Jesus healed a blind man. When interrogated this man knew next to nothing about Jesus. He did not know where he was. He could not even say if Jesus was a 'sinner' or not. All he could do - and what it seems all the Spirit required of him in this moment - was to humbly, boldly, stand with Jesus, and not deny him: ***'Whether he is a sinner or not I do now know, but I do know this: I was blind, and now I see.'*** (John 9:25) When this man did find Jesus - or rather, Jesus found him - he worshipped Jesus. (vs.38)

This man knew little, but he did believe, worship, and stand with Christ.

I've learnt the hard way about including the Lord in my plans. Or rather, about *not* including the Lord in my plans.

Now, some people do not know the Lord, and so the requirement on them is different to someone who does know the Lord.

'The servant who knows the master's will and does not do what the master wants, will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know... will be beaten with few blows... To those who have been given much, much is expected.'
(Luke 12:47-48)

This is not about literal measures of punishment and discipline. This word of Jesus is saying that some of us know better.

God does not just bless what you do. He partners with you in doing it. This takes faith to receive and to see. You'll know you've seen it, if at the end of what 'you' do, you can say, ***'The Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in my eyes.'*** (Psalm 118:23)

So when you 'build' that house (*project, business, relationship, conversation*), truly be open to the Lord being the key builder, and the cornerstone.

'Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.' (Psalm 127:1)

The Bible teaches us not just about who God is (by far the most important teaching in the Bible!), but also his ways, how he moves, what is of his character, what is not. As we get to know God through the Bible and by his Spirit, we can then 'see' and 'feel' true things of God in life.

For example, we are taught about 'orderly' church meetings in *1 Corinthians 14*, what the focus should be and the true role and purpose and 'place' of the spiritual gifts in gatherings.

We've seen in Jesus' life and teaching that the big crowd dynamic is not his priority. It is always each and every individual that makes up any crowd. And so this should be the *spirit* we feel in a Christian group event.

'Where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.' (Matthew 18:20)

We're told that the true spirit of God's 'wisdom' at work in any setting, is ***'first of all pure'***. *Is this what you are sensing?* We're told that the true 'movement' of Jesus is not one where you have to run here and there to find him, but rather it is one where he comes and ***'knocks on the door of your heart.'*** *Are you feeling left out in this or that movement, or rather that Christ comes and meets you right where you are?*

'Jesus said, 'So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.'"
(Matthew 24:26)

#107

Not a Drop in the Ocean!

People never become less unique just because they are in a crowd.

I think of a raindrop falling into the ocean. In a sense it disappears into the mass of water. But this is not the same with people. No matter how big the crowd, or the number of people throughout history, every individual is a miracle - *the* miracle.

Jesus - '*God with us*' - always prioritized the individual over the crowd dynamic. And where crowds gathered, he would often just sign off and move on. The 'sum' is never greater than the parts!

'The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes after the lost sheep, until he finds it.'

(Luke 15:4)

'Jesus came to seek and save the lost.'

(Luke 19:10)

The celebration of the Spirit of God is around the individual. When Jesus was born a host of angels filled the skies and sang for the shepherds, the lowest in society. (Luke 2:13-14)

And Jesus himself tells us that there is rejoicing in heaven over the sinner who repents - more rejoicing over this sinner's first step, first look upwards, than over the rest of us all settled in. (Luke 15:7)

I remember as a kid, riding my bike home after school or training, often in wind and rain on dark evenings. Sometimes these tough bike rides - 'miserable' technically - had a type of dynamic energy to them. They could feel invigorating, vibrant. Sometimes the street lights and cars and sounds made you feel part of the hustle, the fight, life!

I've known people with great attitudes about hard work. They make the most of life. They turn hard tasks into fulfilling projects. That's commendable. But, my friends, that's not the highest goal - positive thinking and outlooks...

Life was never meant to be that battle to survive. It was never meant to be something we needed to strive to enjoy, or to make the most of. No. Life was made to be perfect peace. And heaven will be. It was made for rest.

Now here is a secret that can help those of us that need help:

'Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.' (Colossians 3:17)

And again,

'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for humans...' (vs. 23)

Who's to say it hasn't just begun? There isn't a day in your life that you can't start over, start afresh.

Maybe there are whole chapters of your life behind you, that make you feel like your 'book' has been written, and the sun's setting. *But no!* Did you know that Moses was 80 years old - a retired man, tending sheep - when God called him, strengthened him, and sent him on history's most dramatic series of events for 40 more years? And when he did die we're told ***'his eyes had not faded, nor his strength abated.'*** (Deuteronomy 34:7)

Your life is eternal in Christ! His mercies are new every morning. (Lamentations 3:23) A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. (Matthew 12:20) Jesus is the one who said,

'You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' (John 3:7)

Maybe today you are weary, and see no way forward. It is here you need to be born again. Let the past 'die', and step again into Jesus Christ. Let him lift your burden off you, and walk you into new paths of forgiveness, healing, and purpose. Yes, purpose! Jesus can open to you, for your years ahead, things you can do and people you can touch to advance his *'kingdom of light'*. (Colossians 1:12)

'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 40:31)

One of the most humiliating things here on earth has nothing to do with anyone's character. It has to do with circumstances. A poor child can feel ashamed and humiliated just because they don't have what those around them have. Or because they cannot 'give' what they would love to give. Maybe you've experienced this? By no fault of your own - and not a fault in itself - has poverty ever left you ashamed?

Jesus himself said that his message - his own presence and person - was **'good news to the poor'**. (Luke 4:18) Jesus cares about people feeling hard done by, and ashamed. Jesus cares about people having dignity, and having wealth. He describes heaven as a place not where everything is free, but where all people can 'buy' what they want without money. There's a difference. Having and 'buying' gives a person a sense of dignity. Jesus cares about this! **'Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.'** (Isaiah 55:1)

The 'good news' for the poor is even more gritty. Jesus said that the last here would be the first there. (Matthew 20:16) He said the poor here were rich in faith, and that faith is actually God's currency. (James 2:5; Hebrews 11:6) Jesus speaks of those who receive praise and honor here, as having received their reward *'in full'*, but encourages the humble to invest in the next life, where their work will be shown for what it is, and they will have great reward!

The 'good news' for the poor in Christ, is that they will be rich - richer than the rich here!

Worshipping God is actually stepping into what we believe. It's not thinking about God, it is gazing *on* him. It is not talking about Jesus, it is talking *to* him.

'One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.' (Psalm 27:4)

Worship is of the heart, not the actions, not even the words.

'Jesus said, 'God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship him in Spirit and in truth.' (John 4:24)

Bowing down is not worship in itself, but it might help express worship sometimes. Same with kneeling. Same with standing. Same with a lifted head, a lowered head. Music can help - if it helps your heart and mind to lift to the Lord, to praise.

Hearts, homes, communities and nations have been saved and built on worship. When people of faith 'pray' (not recite, chant, but believe and look to God), God '***heals the land***'. In Jesus, my friend, the Law and all rules and regulations disappear, and we find ourselves in the very presence of God - now and forevermore. This space is the realm of worship.

'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.' (Jeremiah 31:33)

I like to tie things up, finish things, and then rest. Now, this is OK if we're talking about some basic chore or project; but sometimes this desire to square things away can creep into my mind, my spirit, my relationships, my work for God. And I can't really rest till I've got that thing in order, or answered, or understood clearly in my own mind.

'The Lord is my shepherd... He leads me beside quiet waters.' (Psalm 23)

When I stop and consider, there's very little I actually do understand, and less that I control or 'secure'. When God stepped down and *'tread on the heights of this earth'* - Jesus Christ - he called me to step through a 'door'. A door of peace. A door of forgiveness. And this door would lead to 'pasture' - from that moment, and forevermore.

'Jesus said, 'I am the door, and anyone who comes through me will be saved, and he will go in and come out and find pasture.' (John 10:9)

Don't wait to rest. Don't do as I do, and strive in heart and mind to finish a thing, before sitting beside the quiet waters.

'The man said, 'I'll follow you, Lord, but first let me...' Jesus said, 'No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.' (Luke 9:61-62)

#113

Free

One of the best texts I ever received was from a young person who wrote: *'I'm feeling free!'*

You see, we had been discussing a tough situation in his life, his heart, his past. What was 'real', what was just the accusation of the enemy, false guilt, condemnation - not healthy, holy conviction. We had prayed for the Lord to forgive, heal, release. We had asked Jesus to blow his Spirit through his mind and heart and make new.

Complete release is the goal! As true and new as rising from the dead. Jesus said that he was ***'sent to proclaim freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners.'*** (Luke 4:18)

Freedom of the soul is a prize that we fight for. Life is messy, it is a bag of both good and evil. People have been made in God's image, and have true goodness in them. But we also have complete darkness in us, evil that turns against God and mankind. So as we walk with Jesus, and come to see his 'true light' more and more, we reach for it. We let more in. We distinguish, by his Spirit, what is of God, what is not of God.

When Jesus reveals to you 'true light', prize it. Ask him to let this light soak into your core. Hold to what you have, and walk deeper into the Light.

'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yolk of slavery.' (Galatians 5:1)

When sin came into the world, it poured darkness through the land. It poured darkness into our minds and hearts. This does not mean that we became *'all bad'*, as we are still made in the image of God, and walk the land that was once paradise. However, what it does mean is that we are no longer *'all good'* - no part of us naturally and completely pure. Not mankind, not animals, not nature. Hence the trajectory of illness, decay, death - in everything.

'Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.' (Romans 5:12)

Some good, some bad. At times the whisper of our heart is true, trustworthy, at other times our heart can *'condemn us'* when God is not. (1 John 3:20) At times what comes naturally to us - instincts, desires - is good. At other times what we want *'naturally'*, or tend to, is not pure, was not God's *'nature'*, but from our *'sinful nature'*.

And so God instructs us. From the time our nature was compromised, darkened, only partially trustworthy, God began sketching out and communicating his ways, his heart, his laws, his plan. He also sketched out, so to speak, through people, prophecies and foreshadowing, his own person and his own coming to earth - so we would not miss him.

So no longer do we trust our nature for guidance, but rather ***'we take captive thoughts and make them subject to Christ.'*** (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Healthy church gatherings have Jesus and his gospel as the focus - the *clear* focus. To the point where if an unbeliever were to walk in, he or she should 'hear' and 'understand' the truth about Christ, and be ***'convicted of sin... heart laid bare... and fall down and worship God.'*** (1 Corinthians 14:24-25)

If you find yourself part of a 'gathering' or church where the focus is not clearly and primarily Jesus and his gospel - where there is a big emphasis on speaking in tongues, or on each other's thoughts and ideas, or on leadership and roles and tithe and submission - either reform it by the Spirit of God, or cordially bow out and move on. The spiritual gift of 'tongues' is a 'gift' (not something you line up for and 'get'), and it is private prayer between you and God.

'Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them, they utter mysteries by the Spirit.' (vs. 2)

We are told that someone should only speak out in tongues in a church gathering if there is someone present with the gift of interpretation, who can interpret the mystery. And if not, it should not be done. (vs. 27-28) We're told that the other type of gift of 'tongues' - where one is speaking in another language about Jesus - is a sign for unbelievers, not believers. (vs. 20-22)

Prophecy - intelligible, Spirit-led words of truth and instruction about Jesus - is the key 'gift' for healthy church. (vs. 3)

I was listening to some worship music on my phone. Tired. Early morning. I started thinking about a project in the kitchen that 'needed' attention. Well, that could use attention, some work, some improvement. Tired at the thought, to be honest...

God's presence is a real thing. When I close my eyes in prayer, still before the Lord, I'm not just thinking about God or even praying 'to' him. I'm in his presence. I've stepped out of life, so to speak, and into the presence of Jesus, the streets of heaven, the pastures of peace.

'Jesus said, 'God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in Spirit and in truth.' (John 4:24)

As I sat there in the presence of God, pondering a project to do, I felt the Lord ease my burden. I felt the Lord whisper to me that time in his presence *is* true accomplishment, true productivity, true investment and profit. That thing in the kitchen, well, it can wait. In fact, it might never get done!:)

'Jesus went to Martha's home. She had a sister, named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to him. Martha was distracted by all the preparations. She came to Jesus and said, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister is not helping me? Tell her to help!' Jesus answered, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed - indeed, only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'
(Luke 10:38-42)

I love the idea of a warm, cosy mountain cabin. Small, but solid. Snow outside, but a fire going and glowing, coffee on and lots of supplies. Just watching the quiet snowflakes fall, and hearing the gentle sounds of the forest. You know, the call of Christ on your life is actually clear, and nothing and no one can hinder you walking it.

‘Jesus said, ‘My yoke is easy and my burden is light.’ (Matthew 11:30)

This does not mean his *path* will be easy all the time. What it does mean is that his path for you, is the only one you will answer for, and the only course you need to stay. You will not answer for other people’s responses to Christ, or society’s choices and traditions. You will not answer for other Christians’ decisions or directions. You are called to be faithful to the path Jesus leads you on. You are called to be found there. Jesus told a parable about wise and foolish servants, and he said it would *‘be good’* for that servant who is found doing what he has been called to do, when the master returns.

Be faithful to Jesus in what you encounter day by day. This is your path, this is your station. In a sense, my friend, this is your ‘mountain cabin’. Make God’s presence and lead, your home, your resting place. Just stay in that ‘space’. Don’t leave. Honker down. In relationships, in your work, be faithful to Jesus. That’s all you have to do. That’s the only ‘place’ you need to be ‘found’. ***‘Jesus said, ‘When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?’*** (Luke 18:8)

Jesus walked on water. He called Peter out on the waves, and he also walked on water, in a storm. (Matthew 14:22-33) One amazing thing about that story and experience, is what it reveals to us about true 'stability' and 'instability' in our spiritual lives. In life we experience ground beneath our feet as more stable than water beneath our feet. However, in Christ, walking with Christ, what's more stable as a floor beneath our feet - ground or water?

There may be areas in your soul, your spirit, where you feel insecure, uncertain, like you're on the edge of a cliff all the time. The apostle Paul felt like this and described it as a *'thorn in his side'*, and he tried to shake it. He asked God to remove it. But God said to him: ***'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'*** (2 Corinthians 12:9)

There are a few spaces in my soul, in my mind, that are not as firm, as 'secure', as I would like. They feel like pools of water or the edge of a cliff. Some of these spaces I feel the Lord doesn't want to 'firm up'; rather he wants me to know and experience his dependable power everywhere he leads me. He wants his grace to be the rock beneath my feet, always solid, always sure. He wants me to live ***'by faith and not by sight.'*** If he walks me out on water, the water will be solid. If he stands me on the edge of a cliff, no wind could push me over. Eyes on Christ, never on my floor or footing.

'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid of them... For the Lord goes with you. He will never leave you.' (Deuteronomy 31:6)

My wife and I made a short, special trip to New York City. Before going, I bought a travel guide book - compact, full of pictures and summaries of treasures you will find in the city. It was like the whole city had been condensed into this little book, and you could see the sights, map the streets, by turning pages. When we actually stepped into New York, walked the streets, enjoyed the sights, the sounds, the food, the shops, the magic, well, it was an experience *'off the page'*, so to speak.

The travel guide was true, was an experience in itself, and over 20 years later I still enjoy it. New York *on the page*. But the visit to New York, *'off the page'*, is the point of the guide, the real deal, fresh, alive, dynamic, different every day. This analogy - the *'treasure map'*, and the *'treasure'* - holds true for the Bible and Jesus Christ. The Bible contains the words, the truth, the map, of God's living person. When you close your eyes and *'believe'* what God has spoken, has written - his *'guide'* - you will actually *'receive'* Jesus into your heart. God comes off the page. You go through the *'door'*. ***'Jesus said, 'You search the Scriptures because in them you think you possess eternal life, but you refuse to come to me and have life.'*** (John 5:39-40)

'The purpose of the Law [the Bible] was to lead us to Christ.' (Galatians 3:24)

So we gaze on the words of Scripture, because they live and sparkle. But we pass from the written words to the living Word, by faith. And here we gaze on the Spirit of God.

#120

Build on Faith

Jesus called us to actually 'stand' on his Word, to build lives on our faith in him.

He likened his followers to '*lights on a hill*', stakes in the ground, as it were, defining God's name and claim here on the earth.

It is important that we truly believe God's Word and revelation, as gathered together in the Bible. There are two powerful reasons for this. First, because it is true. Simple as that. Important to believe firmly, sincerely, because it is the truth of God.

Secondly, we must believe God's Word and actually obey it, build our lives on it, because this extends the 'build' of heaven to our land here on earth: ***'Your kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven.'*** (Matthew 6:9-13) Look at the practical impact that truly believing can make on our lives here and now:

'Jesus said, 'Anyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock...''
(Matthew 7:24)

'If my people... will humble themselves and pray... and turn from their wicked ways... I will forgive their sin and heal their land.'
(2 Chronicles 7:14)

The mission we are on with Jesus changes not only things 'in' the world, but the world itself. This is why God even speaks of blessing and *'healing the land'*.

It is like dye soaking through a garment. Little by little the whole garment turns from white to red, or in this case, from red to white:

"Come, let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them white as snow..." (Isaiah 1:18)

Jesus himself speaks of ***'making all things new'***, and of a ***'new heaven and a new earth'***.

When you share your faith in Jesus with someone, or you pray for them, or in faith you *'bind'* or *'loose'* spiritual and physical things here on earth, you are not only reaching that soul, that person, but you are permeating the 'air', the history, the landscape of *'all things'*. Look at the 'sweep' of this verse, one I quote often. But it captures for me the 'takeover' of everything. We are not plucking people from darkness; we are partnering with Jesus, his gospel message, in the complete eradication of all sin and darkness and death, in people, in nature, in the heavenlies.

'The knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.'
(Habakkuk 2:14)

One day walking home from the park, there was a baby squirrel on the rocky path. It was running back and forth, but not leaving or moving away. Another man nearby said he had helped a squirrel like this before, to grow, settle, and then released it back to nature. So together, with a cardboard box, we caught the little squirrel and off it went to rehab'!

We live to shelter people. Think about it. As a parent, a sibling, a neighbor, a friend... we find innate purpose in protecting someone else, building homes, securing windows, clothing, food, and even toys or entertainment to 'shelter' from the worries of life, the sorrows...

Jesus did the same. When the soldiers came to take him away, he was with his disciples. He said to the soldiers the most moving thing: ***'If it is me you have come for, let these men go.'*** (John 18:8)

Jesus made a way for us. He sheltered us from the storm of life and judgment, by spearheading that role, taking the hit, the fall. His prize, his purpose? So that we would not have to.

We do the same as followers of Jesus. If I serve the Lord in one way – feeding the poor down this back street, or facilitating this meeting or outreach – well, my brothers are free to do what they are called to do.

We are not all called to do the same thing. But by doing what we are called to do, we cut open paths that others can now walk on.

Teaching 'manners' is a funny thing. But it is so important, and runs deep. I'm not talking about inane 'etiquette'; I'm talking about saying 'thank you', and learning to 'see' and 'acknowledge' when something has been given, sacrificed, served.

As humans we have to learn to say '*Thank you*', before we are thankful. Then over time we come to realize and appreciate things.

Jesus expected gratitude. One time he healed ten lepers, but only one returned to say thank you. Look at what Jesus says:

'Did I not heal ten of you? Where are the other nine? Has only one returned to give praise to God?' (Luke 17:17-18)

When we forget God's blessings, we forget God. We then turn from him. And the truth is, we are then disciplined by him. This happens time and time again throughout Scripture and history. We do it with our own children - when there is no thanksgiving, we stop giving. And God does this also. Not out of a petty spirit regarding 'manners', but because we have turned away and he is no longer 'God' in our lives.

'When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.' (Hosea 13:6)

Spend a few minutes in quiet prayer, just saying thank you to Jesus for blessings. List them...

Someone encouraged me recently. Just a kind word, intentionally delivered. Within five minutes I noticed that I was speaking kind words to other people. I suddenly realized that the wind in my sails – to encourage – was directly as a result of *being* encouraged.

The 'power' to encourage people, is powerful indeed! You may feel down and out, and maybe very low about yourself. This does not have to stop you building someone else up. Even in your weakness you have power to lift another up.

One word. One smile, or thumbs-up. Your power to speak life, peace, kindness, is probably more 'power' than you will ever actually 'acquire' any other way. A million dollars cannot buy or impart this spiritual act. And yet it's on the tip of your tongue.

'If anyone's gift is to encourage, let them encourage!' (Romans 12:8)

#125

Unify!

When I was a kid I felt such 'security' when there was a group behind my cause. This ranged from the school yard to a Christian outreach event. People around me was a type of shield. Group dynamic made me feel safe, and made my sense of identity more tangible.

When it comes to our faith in Jesus, there can be a little more at stake. We must take care what we 'subscribe' to. There are fraternities, sororities, clubs and groups in this life, that have a seemingly harmless entrance point, but quickly can compete with your loyalty to Jesus.

When people were looking to rally behind Jesus at one point, he was careful not to 'sign up'. Look at this incredible Scripture:

'But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.' (John 2:24-25)

If you *do* sign up to a society of any kind, make sure people know that your true allegiance is to the King of kings. If anything competes with this God and his gospel – in spirit, morality, word or deed – you're out!

The very first commandment – and subsequently the one Jesus referenced as the most important – is to have no other god besides the true God. Man-made allegiances can compete with this.

As you grow in your relationship with Jesus, you will begin to notice how he uses your faith in the lives of others. It will be unique to you, and effective in a special way.

Have you ever seen those action movies, with undercover agents? Often they have one identity in 'life', so to speak, but their 'actual' identity (and calling and destiny) is bound up in their special abilities, and their underlying, secret mission. Usually this 'mission' is important for the whole world, but the whole world is almost oblivious to what's going on.

Same with you! I kid you not! Your spiritual gifts, and the 'path' God has you on in living your faith and sharing your faith, it is of global importance, it is the 'true you', and yet it might be almost imperceptible to many. Jesus knew his mission, his identity in God, his path. When he encountered people that were not aware and not necessarily engaged in the 'crossfire', so to speak, he just side-stepped them, and kept on in his mission. He didn't take offense. He didn't try to prove who he was.

One time Jesus tried to stop and stay at a Samaritan village, but the people there opposed him. His disciples were highly offended and wanted to '*call down fire from heaven*'. Look how Jesus dealt with this 'block in the road':

'Jesus turned and rebuked his disciples. Then he and his disciples went to another village.'

(Luke 9:56)

People often talk about what legacy you want to leave. I get it. It's really talking about the person you want to be – or should be – here and now, and we can sometimes catch that vision more clearly by talking about the 'end report', even our epitaph. But actually, there is only one report worth living for. And it's not one that we leave behind in the hearts and minds of people. It's the report of our life that God himself documents, and then will speak to, when we meet Him.

'Jesus said, 'I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken...' (Matthew 12:36)

Now, Jesus himself is the one who can save us from this fateful day. That is the glory of the gospel.

'Jesus became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God.'
(2 Corinthians 5:21)

In turning to Jesus, passing to and through him as God's 'door' for salvation, we will *not* give account of every word we have spoken. Rather, our sins will be forgiven, and we will pass free into the eternal 'kingdom of light'. (Colossians 1:12) Jesus told his disciples to not rejoice even at their spiritual accomplishments, but rather to rejoice because their names were written in heaven.

'Then the master will say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'' (Luke 19:17)

Arrogance and pride are familiar to all of us. And so they should be. We see it in ourselves, and we see it in others.

'If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.'

(Galatians 6:3)

Now, we can also fail in a type of 'opposite' way. You've seen the movies, when someone who needs to rise up, who has been called and named and equipped, *doesn't* rise up. The result is damaging to both their own lives, and to that of others. There was an identity and mission available to them, which they miss out on. And there was meaning and impact they could have had in the lives of others, which *those* people miss out on.

It will take faith to step into the identity that God gives you - but it matters! When Jesus names you, equips you and calls you, you will meet with opposition, question, even ridicule. But in the same way it is wrong to be arrogant, it is also wrong to deny your true identity, when given to you.

'God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise... God chose the lowly things of this world - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are.' (1 Corinthians 1:27-28)

Gideon was not a 'warrior', and he was not 'mighty'. But when the angel of the Lord appeared to him, he said: ***'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.'*** (Judges 6:12)

Jesus changes your world. He changes the very air you breathe, and the spirit that blows through your spaces. Where darkness descends on those around you, and you in their midst, a light shines on you from a different, eternal source, and the ground beneath your feet is different: ***'... total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or move about... Yet all the Israelites had light in the places they lived.'*** (Exodus 9:22-23)

Jesus is a 'door' to salvation. But he is also God's 'door' to new worlds – here and now, and forevermore. There are 'pastures' that open to people when they pass through the door of Jesus; pastures that people will not access if they do not know Christ. (John 10:9)

The gospel of Jesus – repenting of our sin and believing in Jesus, taking hold of him – this is not God's 'message' for people, it is the very '*power of God*':

'I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation, to all who believe.'

(Romans 1:16)

It is good news for the poor. It is healing balm for the hurting. It is a new path for the weary.

'For the kingdom of God is not one of mere words but of power!' (1 Corinthians 4:20)

#130

More Faith

Faith is more about seeing than believing. Believing is believing. Faith is *seeing* what we believe.

‘Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.’ (Hebrews 11:6)

When we ‘see’ what it is we believe, we walk strong. Eyes to see. Ears to hear. When Elisha and his servant, Gehazi, were surrounded by an army, both believed in God at the time. But Gehazi panicked, and Elisha did not. The reason was that Elisha was ‘seeing’ what they were in theory believing, and Gehazi was not. When Gehazi’s eyes were opened, however, to ‘see’, his panic subsided quickly:

‘Elisha prayed, ‘Open his eyes, Lord,’... Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.’ (2 Kings 6:17)

When Jesus was describing to the disciples what could be accomplished with faith, they asked:
‘Increase our faith.’ (Luke 17:5)

We can ask the Lord (who we believe in, and that’s why we’re talking to him!) – for more faith. For more vision of what we say we believe. We can ask that we sink a little deeper into the reality of God’s world, God’s ways, God’s movement.

When we ‘see’ more, we venture out further.

I had the privilege of serving on a couple very short outreach weekends with a man of faith named, Steve Fatow. For many years this man would preach the gospel to crowds of people, and then end his short meeting with prayer for healing for the sick.

I had prayed for my knee for many years, and had a surgery about 10 years prior. But I still could not run on my knee, more than a block or two. This had been the case for about 20 years, at this point. I asked Steve to pray for me. He did. It was not for about 10 months after he prayed that I actually tested my knee, and began to walk, jog and run on the knee. It was then I realized it had been healed. I've been jogging now since then, 5-6 days a week, 2.5 miles. No trouble with my knee.

Elisha had the 'key' to healing Naaman's terminal illness. Naaman had to believe this, though, as expressed by going to Elisha and asking for his help. (2 Kings 5) Jesus did this for many.

Here's my question to you today: Is there someone that might have the 'key' to unlock some blessing in your life? A God-given key? This won't be a mystery to solve. It should be easy enough to see. Have you wronged someone, and need to apologize, and maybe ask for *their* prayer of healing on your life? Truly this is not the case all the time. And this is not a word for everyone, today.

'Confess your sin... pray for each other so that you may be healed.' (James 5:16)

I sometimes think about the knock-on effect of sharing Jesus with others. Like, I think, *'If this guy gave his life to the Lord, well, he could then reach...'* It's not bad in itself to think of 'strategy' and reach. But it can limit our understanding of how God works, and what is truly valued. Jesus left the ninety-nine sheep to go and find the lost one – out on the hills, no other sheep beyond that point.

'I have come to seek and save the lost.'

(Luke 19:10)

Jesus did not strategize beyond the person right in front of him. But when you read Scripture you will see what the Lord did with the testimonies of the lowly, the meek, those who had no outlet to testify themselves. Jesus saw, noted, and encased in Scripture the salvation and faithfulness of that person.

'Jesus said, 'She has done a beautiful thing... I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached, what she has done will be told in memory of her.'

(Mark 14:9)

Our legacy of faith is not what we live to tell, but what God notes and anoints ***'in secret'***. (Matthew 6:18)
Sometimes its impact soaks into the atmosphere, the earth, but never wasted, never lost:

'They threw the dead man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.'

(2 Kings 13:21)

I was thinking back to a 'training' I was on for work a few years ago. It was in some hotel outside of my own city. I remember feeling lost. Like, I didn't really have a handle on this job, the sector, the people in it, etc.

Maybe as a Christian – in the Christian 'community' or 'culture' – you might feel like this? Maybe you've felt like you don't really have the heritage, the Bible knowledge, the understanding...?

Well, the truth is, the kingdom of God is different to the kingdom of this world. Its whole system is spiritual, and it is founded on a 'Servant King'.

'Jesus said, 'You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.'

(John 13:13-14)

Jesus elevated the child, honored the lowly, and made the 'doorway' so humble that the most humble take first place - even the 'prostitutes', according to Jesus. (Matthew 21:31-32)

Don't 'aspire' upwards in your faith in Jesus. Just be humble. Sit low. He meets you there. And truly, it is there – right there – that you are filled with 'every *spiritual blessing*', everything you need to be fully equipped, fully part, fully necessary.

'God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.' (Ephesians 1:3)

I remember after a year in Mexico City – my wife and I had taken a year ‘*off books*’ during college – I was overwhelmed with the poverty. I had lost a vision of hope for others. I just wanted to get back to my homeland, take my eyes off the struggle.

The barren landscape of this world, this life, is bigger than we are, more than we can handle. One day Jesus looked at the crowds and saw them as ***‘helpless and harassed, like sheep without a shepherd.’*** Jesus was ***‘moved with compassion’***, but *not* overwhelmed with a sense of despair. In fact, what he saw was ‘harvest’, opportunity, work to be done. He saw people that needed to be reached – and *could* be reached.

‘Jesus turned to his disciples and said, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.’ (Matthew 9:35-38)

So Jesus – full of compassion, moved by their plight – actually saw harvest, saw hope. My friend, you can’t be the ‘worker’ in every situation, or every avenue of need. But you can believe that what you see is ‘need’ and harvest. And you can ‘hope’ for them, and you can pray for them. You can ask the Lord of the harvest to send them workers, to heal this area, this land, to pour in light. Don’t despair. Don’t drop your head. Lift it! Believe for them. Speak the name of Jesus, in faith, over that field.

‘Without faith it is impossible to please God.’
(Hebrews 11:6)

The last will be first. Jesus promised this. (*Matthew 20:16*) They are ***'rich in faith'*** here, which exchanges as wealth in heaven.

The people you and I can 'give' to now, will be the ones who can give to us in heaven. Simple as that. We tend to honor and 'give' to those who can give back to us now. We give admiration, respect, gifts, parties, favors, attention, time... to those who can give us back those same things.

'Jesus said, 'If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?... If you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?'' (Matthew 5:46-47)

When you give to the poor, two people will reward you: That same person (when they are not *'last'*, but *'first'*, and they find you), and Jesus himself.

'He who gives to the poor, lends to God.' (Proverbs 19:17)

Money is not all we can 'give'. And the 'poor' are not just those without money. Someone can be poor in spirit (*discouraged, broken-hearted*), and you may have encouragement to give. Someone may be poor in social standing (*no friends*), and you may have some kindness and listening to give. You have 'advantages' in so many situations every day, many things to give people – even just a smile!

#136

Equipped

Jesus equips you for what he calls you to do or say.

Your personal experience may be of some benefit. Your circumstances in relation to those you are serving, may be relevant. What you have learned and 'know' may be used by the Lord. But the actual 'stamp', the power, is the gentle anointing of the Lord on you. If Jesus sends you, you are equipped.

'If God is for us, who can be against us?'

(Romans 8:31)

So the question is, are you in step with the Spirit? You see, if you 'do' or 'say' things that the Lord has *not* called you to, you may not be equipped or anointed in it.

Jeremiah says to another prophet (yes, a prophet), who had been 'prophesying' to the people about something specific, a current crisis:

'Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies.'

(Jeremiah 28:15)

Even someone truly gifted can begin to trust in their own thoughts, position, and drift from the leading and the words of the Holy Spirit. A warning to us all!

'Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.'

(Psalm 127:1)

The 'temple' was the place! Truly, this religious structure in Jerusalem in Jesus' time, had been built by Solomon with instructions from God. But its time had come to an end!

'Jesus said, 'You will worship... neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... The time has now come... God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in Spirit and in truth.' (John 4:21-24)

Before Jesus came to earth, the priests of the temple – and the priestly community – were paid for their service, and there was clear instruction in the Scriptures about their roles and their support. And of course the temple, too, a specific place of worship and dedicated building, had been ordained.

But at the time of Jesus' coming, this all changed. It was over. A new path had opened. A new way of God. Everyone who believes in Jesus becomes a 'priest', and *is* the temple of God:

'Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone... In him you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.'
(Ephesians 2:19-22)

'Your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you...' (1 Corinthians 6:19)

'Jesus said, 'The kingdom of God is not something that can be observed... because the kingdom of God is within you.' (Luke 17:21)

One of the most humbling truths about Christianity is that we cannot 'prove' it (and nor are we called to); but we must 'testify' to Jesus – and this we are called to. The power of knowing Jesus – comes from Jesus. It comes to us from his own revelation. He opens our eyes. We see him. Then we live to say we see him. We stand with him.

'Let us, therefore, go outside the camp and bear the disgrace he bore.' (Hebrews 13:13)

The blind man who was healed could not 'prove' Christ, and could not speak to the theology. But he did say, ***'This I know, once I was blind and now I see.'*** (John 9:25)

Jesus calls us to stand with him, to say we see and know him. He does not call us to argue his case. He calls us to 'witness' to what we have seen.

'Jesus said, 'The Holy Spirit will testify about me, and you also must testify, for you have been with me.' (John 15:26-27)

My friends, there are God-fearing people all over the world, and we are called to share with them who this true and living God is, Jesus Christ. We share with them, we plant the seed, and we ask God to 'make it grow'.

'Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.' (1 Corinthians 3:7)

The apostle Paul dedicated his life to preaching about Jesus. He even worked to pay his own way, rather than accept offerings from others. He paid to preach, was not paid to preach. And he valued this autonomy!

The actual fruit of Paul's labor – souls - was Paul's reward. Look at this moving verse to the people in Thessalonica:

'What is our hope, our joy, our crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed you are our glory and joy!' (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

The only thing we can take with us from this world to the next, is people. As individuals, and as local churches, this needs to be our investment, our reward, our focus. Why? Because Jesus 'sent' us to do just this, and Jesus himself lived this mission.

'Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.' (John 20:21)

'Jesus said, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' (Matthew 4:19)

'Jesus said, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.' (Mark 16:15)

Not everyone has the same role in the mission, but all of us have been called to the same mission. It's outward focused, to ***'seek and save the lost.'*** (Luke 19:10)

Jesus walked on water one dark and stormy night. Peter saw him and asked Jesus to call him out on the waves. Jesus called him to come. Peter stepped out and walked on water to Jesus in the wind and crashing waves. (Matthew 14:22-33)

There's only one way to know Jesus, to really see him and make him seen. And that is full faith. Jesus does not let his revelation reach those who stand at a distance on the shore, and just talk about him, reason, point, think, even respect. Jesus did not come as another theology for the classroom.

He called people to step out of the boat, to follow, to sacrifice, to stand with him, to obey, to believe, to speak his name, to heal people, to die with him, to rise with him.

'I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' (Galatians 2:20)

When I speak to people about the Bible, we might have a good chat, an interesting one. And there's a time and place for this. But when, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, I share a Scripture with someone, a Word of God for *them*, this is when I see power go forth, tears fall, eyes lift, God and man connect. This only happens when we are standing *in* the Word, and living *out* of it, not standing side-by-side with it.

Have you let go of the world, and stepped inside of Christ and his Word?

One season in my life I had turned my back on the Lord, and started investing money and time in a little business venture. I felt the Lord 'cap' this venture pretty much from the outset, because I knew in my heart I was building it on ego, on anger, on world values. Quickly I saw deals hit the floor (that should have naturally had traction), doors closed (that were naturally open), money lost (literally, lost!)... I knew in my heart that like Jonah, I was running, and the Lord had 'capped' my success on this, until I lay it down, cut my losses, and repent.

Not all suffering or loss is 'discipline' or punishment from the Lord. But some is. This is Biblical. (*Read about the 'rich fool' in Luke 12:13-21 and a very straight word from Jesus in John 5:14*)

There are two key things to note:

- You and I don't know what is punishment from God, and what is not. So be careful not to judge!
- Even if something looks like punishment from God in someone else's life, we are no better in heart and soul than the 'punished'. Look at what Jesus says about a current disaster in his time:

'Do you think those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.' (Luke 13:1-5)

Sometimes I get overwhelmed with the many different 'Christian' organizations, ministries and churches. I wonder at some of them, are they healthy, are they good. Other times I see much good, and just not sure what I'm supposed to be involved in, support, etc.

It is important to know that the 'counterfeit' *does* exist, and always did. But we must not fear it, must not stress about it:

'Some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry... Don't be frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved...'

(Philippians 1:15,28)

So what should *you* do? What should *you* support or be involved in? Well, what is God whispering to you?

Don't worry about the many other options and ministries, what to approve of, what to oppose. Just settle, listen, focus, and walk in *your* calling faithfully, joyfully, in freedom and peace.

Paul wrote this to the church in Corinth:

'I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.'

(1 Corinthians 4:3-4)

I recently met a woman who was in an abusive relationship. We had a brief but straight talk about the Lord Jesus – about his care, his promises, his power. I was struck when she began to cry. She was moved by the truth of God. She said this. She began to speak of hope. She spoke of a new plan. Her eyes lit up. She said she was going to believe and pray with more intention.

As I drove home I pondered. I reflected on this experience of the name of the Lord, his gospel and Word, coming alive in the heart and in the eyes of a person. We have power to bring the name and gospel of Jesus alive to people.

‘If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.’ (Romans 10:9)

This faith-filled ‘speaking’ is not about ‘getting’ saved. When you believe on Jesus you *are* saved. This is clear throughout Scripture. However, there is ‘power’ and ‘consummation’ in speaking out, ***‘Jesus is Lord’***. Salvation, as it were, breaks forth, goes outward, when we declare with our mouths.

When faith brings forth testimony, by the lead of the Holy Spirit, power pours forth, the gospel comes alive.

‘They overcame the devil by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony.’
(Revelation 12:10-11)

I've been married a couple decades now. Doesn't feel like it, really, because I feel much like the same person I was back in the day, in my youth. You know, a common struggle in marriage – maybe you know this from experience – comes from trying to change each other. Not surface stuff, but tendencies, personalities, focus, etc. (*Doesn't work, newsflash!*)

So what *does* bring about real, lasting change in a person? Well, interestingly, not the 'Law'. Not the law of God. Not rules and regulations. These can change behavior, somewhat. (Usually if there are consequences, and when behavior is seen, caught). And these 'laws' are important. But laws don't change the heart.

'The Lord says, 'These people acknowledge me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'
(Isaiah 29:13)

True change comes from a heart change. And Jesus changes hearts. When we repent of our sin – actually turn our 'heart' away from sin in our life – and reach for Jesus, believe in him, he comes inside us, inside our souls, by his Holy Spirit.

Here a change happens – if you let it. Here the Holy Spirit will begin to prompt, lead, and change your heart.

'Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come!'
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

#145

Data!

Sometimes I'm overwhelmed by all the 'data' in life. The information, the quotes (even wise ones), the facts, figures... trainings with point after point after point... Mental exhaustion!

Both the heart and the mind took the hit of our sin. The story at the beginning of the Bible, of Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden fruit, well, it was from the *'tree of knowledge'*. They ate to 'know', thinking that 'knowledge was power', and that they could become *'like God'*. (Genesis 3:1-5)

So at that point death claimed all things – people, animals, even nature. Not just in a 'timeline' of mortality, but in spirit. Our thinking and our hearts darkened.

Against this exhausting, prideful rush for 'knowledge', look at the picture and person of Jesus. He is *'One'*, and he is everything.

'Christ is all, and is in all.' (Colossians 3:11)

In Jesus we come to just *one* name, one sacrifice, one *'living Word'*. We come to one cross, one death, one kingdom. So much rest for our souls. So much quietness of mind. Peace.

'Martha was busy... but Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening... Jesus said, 'Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her.'
(Luke 10:38-42)

God *reveals* his truth – he does not ‘explain’ it.

Why? We are small and limited in what we can understand. Look at the stars or the ocean. Then look at the size of your head in a mirror. Also consider how your words and thoughts and understanding has ‘formed’ since youth, and changed, and continues to change, and strain, and how you’re already getting older and your mind’s strength already fades... And we wonder why we can’t have and hold ‘understanding’ about God Almighty!

And we’re broken. Our understanding is not only small, but darkened with mortality and rebellion. It was the tree of knowledge that we ate from, and so die. (Genesis 3) Limited and broken hearts and minds.

Now, in the same way you can see expanse, know it, touch it – like the ocean or the skies – but not fit them in your mind, so, too, you can see, know and touch God.

How, then, do we access the *true* vision of God’s revelation? We go through the door that God has provided.

‘Jesus said, ‘I am the door, and anyone who comes through me will be saved, and they will come in and go out and find pasture.’

(John 10:9)

Only in going through the door of Jesus, will we see life and truth and Spirit as God reveals it.

We all wear many hats. Currently I'm a father, husband, employee, neighbor, etc. How about you? How many 'hats' are you wearing?

So our 'hats' are our roles, and sometimes our 'identities'. Usually both a role and part of our identity. But we actually choose what we 'prize'. Often wrongly. So, I can take my job for granted, which is not right, but I can also take my job too seriously, which is not right. It can claim more of me than it should. This goes for any role, or 'hat' that we wear.

Look what Jesus said about the man who found the truth about God:

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.' (Matthew 13:44)

When we find Jesus, we have found God. The search is over. You hold the Spirit of eternal life in your soul, now and forevermore. Your sins are gone, and you are a new creation.

One 'hat' we wear is our identity as a believer in Jesus, a follower, a Christian. Is this truly my prized hat?

Sometimes I speak more truth than I realize in the moment. Other times I've thought I'm speaking inspired truth, and I look back and realize I was waxing lyrical, and was a '*clanging symbol*'.

Real truth – words that flow from the Holy Spirit, to and through us – are liquid gold. When we speak, or sing, in harmony with heaven. When we are the mouth piece for the whisper and the call of Christ to a listening soul.

As a believer in Jesus, with a humble heart, a deep love for God, and a thirst to hear him, you can (and *do*) speak his living, Spirit-words, in Jesus' name.

Sometimes you will without even knowing – you will be used by God. But other times you can be 'present' in the moment, you can *know* you speak his inspired words of healing, of the '***gospel of peace***', and that you were led to that moment and that thought.

Ask Jesus to hear his voice more deeply. Ponder the Scriptures that you read, that he has put across your eyes and ears that day. Stop. Listen. Close your eyes. Feel.

When king David looked back on his life, and uttered his last words, he recalled this privilege, this blessing, this treasure that was granted him over the years:

'The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.' (2 Samuel 23:2)

When a battle is actually won, there have been so many small victories that led to that moment. In every arena, not just war. Think of a sporting match or a business venture, a building or art project, or a mission.

The disciples of Jesus were experiencing people turning to the message of Jesus. Here is what Jesus told them:

'I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefit of their labor.' (John 4:38)

When you meet someone who is open to Jesus in your life, open to your faith and your words of faith to them, this is reaping what others have worked for. Prayers, acts of kindness, someone teaching them as children about God. Someone who was a person of faith giving them a sense that God could be trusted... And then they are open to you.

And *your* 'hard work' will weaken the resistance of the devil in other people's lives. You may take some 'hits' for your faith, or encounter opposition. Jesus did. The disciples did. Many across the world do. But every prayer, act of kindness and gentle testimony about Jesus, undermines – weakens – the fortress walls in a person's heart. And one day, in Jesus' name, the walls will fall and they will see and acknowledge the Lord.

Your '**hard work**', your stand, truly matters and will be rewarded.

We're told in the very last chapter in the Bible, about a river that flows in heaven:

'The angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God... down the middle of the great street of the city...' (Revelation 22:1-2)

Even in my mind I can 'gaze' on this image for a long time. I love water. I love its power and rush and exhilarating life force... Jesus himself spoke of giving '*living water*' to him who asked, and also being a source of living water from the very soul of a person who believed.

'He who believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within him.' (John 7:38)

No matter where you find yourself here on earth – whether down a dark alley among unbelievers, or in a church gathering among many believers – the goal is to keep '***in step with the Spirit***'. (Galatians 5:25) The goal is not to be 'part' of this and 'separate' from that, but in the flow of the living waters of God wherever we are. By the leading of the Spirit of God, Jesus sometimes found himself in the house of sinners, touched by prostitutes, eating with people of bad reputation. By the leading of the Spirit Jesus sometimes found himself rebuking strongly not only the Pharisees but his own inner circle of disciples.

The aim is always to be in the flow of the Spirit of God, in the living waters of *his* river.

We build stages. We build stage sets. We mount the lighting, test the surround sound, the smoke machines, the mics. We set the time. We set the theme. We say, 'Go!'

The above describes the way we do business, and 'showtime', here on earth. But as followers of Jesus, we are part of another story at work, another kingdom being built, another 'history' under way.

So, for example, not far from where you are on any given day, there might be a huge event – political, sports, religious, even Christian. But the event of even greater importance on an eternal level and scale, might be a quiet encounter *you* have. God might cross your path with one person who needs something Spirit-led from you, a faith-filled word and act of God's love. Here in this moment, the script of eternal history is being written. Not where the big noise is, but where the whisper is, where Jesus is leading.

'The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.'

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it... he went out.' (1 Kings 19:11-13)

You feel like a failure. You wonder. Your story looks fragmented. This very day looks like a mess. Meaningless?

The life of Jesus was a mess, and misunderstood. His poverty was a challenge for those around him, and even his miracles often had a messy process. Paul was the same as an apostle of Christ. His direction would often change with a sudden dream (leading him to a city where he was beat and nearly killed), and sometimes the devil himself would block travel plans Paul had made. Paul, too, often found himself hungry, cold, fighting sin in his own heart and seeing his work for Jesus 'fragmented' and unclear.

Hold steady, my friend. Following Jesus is a very real, very deep relationship. Your faith is **'more precious than gold.'** (1 Peter 1:7) And your real reward will only be seen, only known, when you meet the Lord face-to-face. We are told that only then we will see our work **'for what it is.'** (1 Corinthians 3:13)

So steady on in those quiet, private places where you continue faithful to the Lord. It is there, in your heart of hearts, that all things take root and yield fruit.

'We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed...' (2 Corinthians 4:7-8)

#153

Every Brick

A deep comfort to me is that Jesus is, step-by-step, moment by moment, taking back this world.

After Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sin, he rose again. At this point in human history, everything changed. Death had been defeated. (2 Timothy 1:10) And Jesus now began a 'takeover' mission of the whole world, the whole universe. Here is what he said in that moment to his disciples:

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples...'
(Matthew 28:18-19)

Jesus had also told Peter that even the '*gates of hell*' could not stop the advance of his kingdom. (Matthew 16:18)

Sometimes here on earth it feels like darkness reigns, and righteousness bends and breaks under the force of evil. But this is not true. The victory is already in the hands of the Lord, and day by day he presses darkness into its ultimate place of judgment. Very soon, my friends, all sin, destruction, hurt, sorrow and scars will be no more. Hold to Jesus. Hope in him. Even now this victory is yours!

***'This is what the Lord says:
Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and
plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend
with those who contend with you, and your
children I will save.'*** (Isaiah 49:25)

Jesus gives us an 'identity' that we can actually choose. This is an amazing gift to us, an opportunity for safety, for belonging!

People crave belonging. They stamp themselves with signs and brands, just to identify with something or some people. They join a gang, well, because there is no other gang or group or 'identity' on offer.

Sometimes more vulnerable than joining a group, is not joining a group. People flounder with no direction, no value system, no moral code...

You, my friend, have an offer from Jesus to belong to him. You can believe on him, follow him, and 'be' a Christian. This is protection!

'The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.' (Acts 11:26)

If you truly take hold of Christ, become one of his, you will not only have direction in life, but protection. You will be able to tell people, ***'I can't look at that, because I am a Christian.'*** Or ***'I cannot agree to that because I am a Christian.'*** The identity Jesus gives you, protects you.

'You are not your own; you were bought at a price.' (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

'To all who did receive Jesus, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.' (John 1:12)

#155

By the Fruit

I know a guy who claims to believe in Jesus. But something wasn't sitting right with me. I was thinking about him, and started mumbling a prayer, when the Lord prompted me to not pray, but listen.

As I listened to the Lord he recalled these truths to my mind:

People can 'name' Jesus Christ without following him. I say 'following' him, because they may 'believe', but not be obeying or 'walking the walk'.

In the same way, people can 'wear' a cross, or tattoo a verse, and not be following Jesus in their lives, words, thoughts, faith.

Jesus admonished us to know people by their fruit, not their words:

'Beware of false prophets... By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?'

(Matthew 7:15-16)

Paul referred to '*false believers*', and in the Old Testament there were many references to priests who had turned false, prophets who were prophesying lies, etc. So heed the words of Jesus, and allow them to free you. There may be some people in your life that are saying the right words, but the fruit – or lack thereof - gives you reason enough to back away a little.

The mission of Jesus is to make all things new!
(Revelation 21:5) He suffered to bring goodness – and not sorrow – to the world. He died to **‘defeat death’** (2 Timothy 1:10) and to **‘destroy the works of the devil.’** (1 John 3:8)

God does not wallow in sorrow, nor discourage hearts with reports of despair. He lifts the weary face to himself, to see light, and to hope in goodness.

Where God is, there is hope. If a situation – or report – has no hope in it, it is not the ‘full’ report, it lacks the Spirit of God.

‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.’
(2 Corinthians 3:17)

Our God, Jesus Christ, is the **‘God of hope’**. (Romans 15:13) He dispels despair.

‘There will be no more gloom for those who are in despair...’ (Isaiah 9:1)

Our God is He who does not bring the sorrow, but wipes away the tears where there has been sorrow.

The message of Jesus’ death, is a message of his resurrection. Death behind, heaven ahead. Every report of God – or with God in it – must have the Spirit and the history of resurrection, redemption.

‘He will wipe away every tear from their eyes...’
(Revelation 21:4)

Human 'help' or rescue often looks like this: the stronger, the wealthier, moves in on a needy situation and deposits resources – money, stuff, influence, promises. Not a bad thing! But there is a pattern in it, i.e. the strong one steps into a space, is seen and honored as stronger and richer, helps, and typically leaves that space, back to their space.

Two points on this:

- **Servant God**: In Jesus, God did the opposite to what we do. He actually 'assimilated' into the people he was coming to rescue. He made himself poor, put aside his glory and '**made himself nothing**'. (Philippians 2:7) This was not just a one-off act of humility. No, this was to the 'core'. Jesus became less than others. So much so that people despised him and rejected him. (Isaiah 53)
- **Power to Change!** Now remember, Jesus was on mission! He made himself lowly, even poor, because he bore the gospel message in himself, and to people, which is the '**power of God for salvation**'. (Romans 1:16) He was not meek for the sake of being meek. He was meek and humble and 'one of us', in order to bring us the gospel of Jesus Christ – of repentance and faith for salvation!

'For the kingdom of God is not one of mere words but of power!' (1 Corinthians 4:20)

When I was a young Christian, I thought I had to relate to people in their personal circumstances, in order to ‘qualify’ to share about Jesus with them.

For example, if I was not homeless, well, I thought I had no right to speak of God’s love and promises and the gospel message to someone homeless. They might say, *‘You don’t understand my life! How can you talk to me about God!?’*

Two points on this, and two verses:

- **Authentic**: You are not called to ‘relate’ to everyone, as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You are called to stand with Jesus in truth – in *your* circumstances – and share his gospel as he leads. You don’t have to relate, but you do have to be ‘true’. After all, my friend, you are not preaching about your own life. You are sharing about Jesus who *does* understand, love and care about this person.
- **Just not true!** I have never encountered the reaction I once feared. In fact, the further removed from my personal life situation (and I mean, the more hardship someone is in), the more receptive they are, and grateful, that I share with them about Jesus.

‘We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ...’
(2 Corinthians 4:5)

‘Has not God chosen the poor in the eyes of the world, to be rich in faith?’ (James 2:5)

Jesus said that the harvest was ripe. He was talking about people being ready to hear about him, put their trust in him, and be saved.

But interestingly, even when Jesus emotionally made this statement, he pointed us to the Father of the harvest, and instructed us to ask Him to 'send' workers.

'When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers...'

(Matthew 9:36-38)

We cannot just see a need, and rush to activity. Jesus saw the need, felt compassion, and instructed us to partner with him, to pray to the Lord, in order to see workers 'sent', led, facilitated. This is how God works the field of harvest.

If you want to be part of harvesting souls for Jesus, I have great news for you: You don't go it alone! Jesus stands with you, goes before you, and you can – you must – pray to the Lord of the harvest to send you, to lead you, and open doors.

'Jesus said, 'I can do nothing on my own... whatever the Father does I also do.' (John 5:19)

#160

Seek Together

Sometimes I feel most alone, most lonely, when I'm in a gathering of Christians. Now bear with me here, though this might sound a little 'off' at first...

You see, the grand prize in this life is coming to know Jesus.

'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who found a treasure...' (Matthew 13:44)

Angels longed to see what we see in Jesus. (1 Peter 1:12) Jesus is everything!

'Christ is all...' (Colossians 3:11)

From a young age I thought, I felt, that to come together with other Christians is effectively as good as an experience can get. After all, everyone here has 'arrived'. Here the 'saints' gather, the treasure is found, everything pure, good, fulfilled.

Well, yes and no. Christians are a gathering of saved people, lost sheep come together. People are at different places in this new-found salvation and safety.

The real key, my friend, to enjoying the presence and fellowship of other believers, is to see 'gathering' as a place to '*seek together*'. Together we stand to share who we know (Jesus), and seek more of who we know: Jesus.

'One thing I ask... to gaze on the beauty of the Lord, and to seek him...' (Psalm 27:4)

Stories of martyrs have always depressed me a little. I think it was a mix of the sheer violence, pain and sorrow, and also the sense that anything other than martyrdom really counted. So I would feel a little low, like what's the point in my tiny offerings of faith and faithfulness, in comparison to the 'real deal', the martyr?

Two brief thoughts on this:

- **Important to know**: It is important to be informed about the price some (many) people have paid, and do pay, for the treasure of knowing Jesus. However, like all truth in Christ, it should come with the leading of the Spirit. We shouldn't obsess on these hard stories, nor put them on children too young to process them – spiritually and emotionally. As the Spirit leads...
- **As God tells it**: What do I mean by this? Well, when I read about martyrs in the Scripture, particularly in Hebrews 11 and story by story, it is in a spirit of such inspiration, joy, focus, freedom... These stories seem to validate the childlike faith, even the prayer – which Jesus told us to pray – to ***'deliver us from evil.'*** God tells of martyrdom with children cradled in his arms, so to speak, in his Spirit, with a focus on life and not death.

'Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' (Matthew 19:14)

It is humbling to me that I believe in a 'book'. I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. This is something that some people ridicule. I wish that God's truth was just intuitive to me – and others. Like, we all just know and see what is right, what is good, we walk it naturally, we understand it deeply. Not only would life flow easily, but I would feel less vulnerable, because I would not be leaning on a 'book' that people could reject.

Three points on this:

- I don't believe in the Bible. I believe in God, and I believe God has spoken and it has been recorded, and collated into this manuscript we call the Bible. I believe in God, and I believe God communicates.
- God's written word does not just instruct *about* God, but tests our own hearts *towards* God. Jesus put it this way: **'If you believed Moses you would believe me, because Moses wrote about me.'** (John 5:46)
- Show me any 2 people who 'intuitively' have the same understanding of God and truth. Or, in that case, are living lives that move intuitively and consistently towards their *own* understanding of right and wrong, not just what they think God might approve of. If people don't think the same, or even live according to what *they* think, we need guidance. We need God to speak and leave us a record of what he's spoken.

God has disciplined me in my life. There have been times when I left the path of Jesus and wandered. It usually starts deep within the heart, a type of anger or hurt, that twists into self-pity and license. And then I find myself sinning.

‘When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.’

(James 1:13-15)

Now, let me get back to ‘discipline’, to the road back. One time God offered his people a ‘path of life’, but it was surrender to the enemy, and they would be in bondage. But they would be alive, at least. This ‘path of life’ might have looked and felt like ‘death’, but it was God’s offer at the time, a first step ‘back’ towards restoration. When God is with us, and has forgiven us for sin, and we are on a journey back, sometimes he offers us a path that is hard, looks low and even depressing, but it is his offer at the time, and it is on his road to redemption. If he is the one offering it, you can trust it, and go. He is with you. And he will lead you on from there if you are faithful.

‘The Lord says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death... Whoever surrenders will escape with their lives.’

(Jeremiah 21:8-9)

You matter. Every hour of your life matters. Your boss might not treat you like that, or your family and friends. But to God, the deep stirrings of your soul and mind and heart are 'counted'.

'Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' (Matthew 6:18)

Things you do in secret might include directing your thoughts to pure things, or choosing to 'block' or turn away from pornography and things you should not look at. Things in secret might include praying for people, or saying a kind word to someone.

Jesus was watching one day as people were putting their offering into the temple treasury. Jesus noted that a poor woman who put less money in the plate than anyone else, had actually given more than anyone else. Why? Because she gave in faith, and she actually sacrificed for God. And God saw this, Jesus saw this.

The temple that was built and sustained by all the offerings it received, all the money, well, that temple is no more. But the offering that widow made continues to ring out in the Scriptures and in the hearts and minds of many, because God was watching her. And he sees and 'counts' you!

'The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.' (1 Samuel 16:7)

I was a 'missionary kid'. That means my parents were on 'mission', and I was along for the ride. It was an extraordinary childhood, really, but I want to focus on just one experience here.

I loved, as a young boy, to find myself visiting a type of new building. For me it was often a church, or the offices of a person connected to us through a church. My brother and I would run the carpeted corridors, and weave in and out of trees and paths on the grounds of this building. We would find exciting things, like a stash of sport equipment, and we'd invent games.

What I remember is the feeling of safety. Nice walls, clean floors, nice people, food and drink... These places, these experiences, actually 'meant' something to me. They meant 'safety', peace, destiny, that everything would be OK.

When we meet Jesus, we come into safety. We come into God's 'salvation' – salvation from darkness, sorrow, hurt, scars, condemnation.

'The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous [those who believe] run into it, and they are saved.' (Proverbs 18:10)

Jesus will lead you beside '***quiet waters***' and '***restore your soul***'. Let him. Receive. Let the quiet, refreshing experience that he gives you, whisper to you the truth of your future with him.

I think about heaven quite a lot. My daughter and I even 'dream' about it together sometimes. We 'design' it in our heads.

Jesus had his sights set on heaven. (Hebrews 12:2) We're told our faith and love 'spring' from our hope that is stored up for us in heaven; so our faith and love actually flow to us from heaven. (Colossians 1:5)

However, when Jesus came to us here on earth, he brought heaven down. And he called us to pray that the kingdom of God – heaven – would invade and **'be done'** on earth. (Matthew 6:9-13)

When Jesus was actually preparing to leave earth and return to heaven, he told his disciples they should be glad about this. And for one particular reason: He was going to pour out his presence, his Holy Spirit, on the *earth*, after he departed.

'Jesus said, '... I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.' (John 16:7)

Jesus is with you *now*. Such is the presence and power of his Holy Spirit with us now, that Jesus said it was 'good' for us that he was leaving as a man.

Allow Jesus today to be with you. Be still. Believe. Allow his Holy Spirit to be fully with you now.

When we chose to follow Christ, we switched out our citizenship. It was as true (truer, in fact) as emigrating from your country of origin, to a foreign land, and then switching out your citizenship completely.

'Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.'

(Philippians 3:20)

We no longer belong to this world or its systems. We belong to Christ, and our home is heaven. More than this, we are even now – here on the earth – operating *in* our heavenly kingdom. We are like agents here. Now, even agents have to live, work, eat, sleep... So we are truly living and surviving here on earth, just like our neighbors and friends.

But our true purpose, our real investment, our sources of courage, direction, meaning, come from our 'other world', God's kingdom. We know that only his kingdom is the one that will last. We know that only Jesus sits on the eternal throne. We know that all people were made by Christ, and will answer to Christ.

So as we move through ups and downs of this or that job, this or that relationship, event, etc., let's keep our eyes and ears open to what's really going on around us, what God is doing in people's lives.

'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.' (2 Corinthians 4:18)

#168

Vision

There's an amazing verse about 'vision', in the sense of 'purpose'.

'Without a vision, the people perish.'

(Proverbs 29:18)

We need a 'cause'. We need a reason to live. Just 'surviving' is not enough.

Jesus Christ offers us a reason to live, an actual project to work on, now until we die. He calls us to be builders – construction workers – of his kingdom.

'Jesus said, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers...'' (Matthew 20:1)

The mission of Jesus – to seek and save the lost, and build his new, everlasting kingdom – can be your mission. Your ultimate reason to live. Your truest legacy. It can be your 'project', your 'vision'.

This inspires me, because I need more to live for, than just this life. I love this life, don't get me wrong, and I love all it has to offer. But I need, deep in my soul, to be building something greater, lasting, eternal.

'Jesus said, 'Come, follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men.'' (Matthew 4:19)

Some things *'mean'* things. We live in a spiritual life, made by God, and he ***'makes his thoughts known to mankind.'*** (Amos 4:13)

You have had some experiences when God was speaking to you personally. It's true. And when you think back – to a childhood experience, a dream, an encounter, a 'sense' – you see that there was a whisper of God in that moment over your name, your life, your worth, your destiny.

The truest word God will whisper to you is his own name – Jesus. He prophesied his coming, he foreshadowed it from Genesis to Malachi. Then he was born a babe, just like you. And he grew up to be able to look you in the eyes, and know you. Have you known Christ? Have you looked in the eyes of God?

We can miss it. We can miss his voice, his call, his lead, his revelation of Christ.

The prophet Isaiah, 600 years before Christ, spoke this word:

'They will be seeing, but not perceiving, hearing, but not understanding...' (Isaiah 6:9)

Jesus quoted this same verse, and then stated:
'because they have closed their eyes.'
(Matthew 13:15)

Sit for a minute today and pray. Sit quietly. Be still before the Lord. Whisper to him and ask: *'Have you spoken to me about Jesus? Have I listened?'*

#170

Follow

We all choose paths in this life. Maybe, for example, you were good at something, or interested in something, and you walked a little further down the path of that career or interest...

Paths we take can define us – for better or for worse. For example, if we choose a particular ‘social’ path, like a group of people or a set of values, well, this path leads us to commitments, to relationships, to causes, to experiences and circumstances... This is not always a bad thing, and this is why our choices matter.

‘Walk with the wise and become wise...’
(Proverbs 13:20)

Jesus not only called us to believe, but to ‘follow’. I was pondering this recently. I was thinking of those people back in the day who actually set out physically, practically, to follow Jesus. I was thinking of what they told their friends, their family. I mean, literally they were going to ‘follow’ Christ.

Jesus said of himself that he was a ‘path’, or ***‘the way’***. (John 14:6)

‘Whoever wants to be my disciple... must take up their cross and follow me.’ (Mark 8:34)

Following Jesus is where the ‘rubber hits the road’. It is where our belief becomes ‘faith’, and our faith becomes action. Here – Jesus as a ‘Way’ – his path defines us.

When I imagine an angel going into a scary place – like a graveyard, alone, in the dead of night – fear seems to dispel around them. It is as if their light, their power, simply cuts to the core and defines the place as peaceful. Although this is something I ‘imagine’, it is informed by all the stories of angels throughout the Bible. This is truly the impact of the presence of the Lord and his angels when they appear.

‘An angel of the Lord appeared... and the glory of the Lord shone around...’ (Luke 2:9)

Two points on this. First, the ‘power’ of the angels is the blood of Christ. Jesus defeated death, his own life was the perfect sacrifice for sin, and his blood which fell on the earth, claimed the earth. He paid for it. It is his.

‘They overcame the devil by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.’
(Revelation 12:11)

And secondly, Jesus protects you. He is with you, and his angels are, too. I love these two verses about protection, especially when I am afraid:

‘The Lord is with me like a dread warrior.’ (Jeremiah 20:11)

‘Jesus said, ‘Do not despise one of these little ones [you!]. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.’ (Matthew 18:10)

In my mind I sometimes retreat to a room in a bamboo-type home out in the jungle areas of Asia. Maybe the Philippines? I was there as a kid, and have many memories of these remote, quiet, lonely places.

In my mind I'm looking out a window, no glass, watching the rain come down hard over the tree tops and mountain range. I'm sitting and watching, listening.

Here in this place I feel the presence of the Lord. I can 'see' that in Jesus, God has come to us. That was the meaning of his name, after all: ***'Immanuel, which means, God with us.'*** (Matthew 1:23)

But here in these 'alone spaces' I feel it a little deeper. Jesus is not just 'God with us', but '*God with me*'. '*God with you*'. I sit and watch the rain, hear the waters, and I feel I have been found. And I feel that I have found the full meaning of this life, this universe: Jesus.

'Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me.'
(Psalm 42:7)

Do you need to sit with Jesus today? Do you need to rest a little from life's worries, and even our mission in Christ? Just sit and allow Jesus to be '*God with you.*'

Elisha was a mighty prophet. You can read about his life in 1 Kings 1-13.

When Elisha was dying, the king visited him. This king, we are told, *'did evil in the eyes of the Lord'*. Nonetheless, this king came to pay tribute to Elisha.

What happens at this moment gives us a glimpse of what it is to live by faith, and in faith.

Elisha, on his death bed, uses this encounter with the king to prophesy. He foretells the outcome of a battle. But then he tests the king through the word of the Lord. He calls him to strike the ground with arrows. The king does it three times and then stops. At this moment Elisha becomes angry with him, and tells him that if he had struck the ground five or six times, he would have had a full and complete victory over their enemies, but now, because he had struck the ground only three times, he would not completely defeat the enemy.

Elisha was not holding onto this life. He was not consumed with his own health, praying for healing. He was consumed with the word of the Lord, and the eternal truth, light, power, presence of the eternal God – even on his death bed. He lived not just 'here' by faith, but in the very realm of faith, in the very reality and world that is eternal.

'For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.' (Colossians 3:3)

#174

Broken

Some pain in life feels like 'game over'. Some experiences, some 'blows', knock the wind out of us, and we find it hard to lift our eyes, to really hope again.

Are you broken-hearted?

Has someone sinned against you, and broken you?

Have you sinned against someone, and broken yourself?

'The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.'

(Psalm 34:18)

Maybe today you need to allow the healing power of Jesus to come over you. Do you? Do you need healing balm, healing Spirit, a ***'new heart and new spirit'***? (Ezekiel 36:26)

Or maybe today you need to repent of a sin you committed, and let Jesus come and touch you. This too is healing for our brokenness. Are you racked with guilt, and long to be free? This brokenness, too, Jesus heals.

'Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.'" (Matthew 9:12)

Of Jesus it was said: ***'A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.'*** (Matthew 12:20)

'What about people who have never heard the message about Jesus...?'

This is a deep question! Honestly, there is no satisfactory 'philosophical' answer to this. However, we are called by God to take his gospel to the ends of the earth. So the safest answer to above question is: We must pray for those people, and go preach to them.

'How will they hear unless someone preaches to them?' (Romans 10:14)

Now another question is, *'Why us?'* Like, why do we need to do the preaching? Does God really need us in this?

Well, again, when we start 'philosophizing' about what God *'needs'* and doesn't need, we're way off! How can we understand things such as God's 'needs'?

What we *do* know is what God has revealed to us. He has not explained his ways, but he has made them known to us. And we are called by God to carry, live, speak, share, the message about Jesus.

'My ways are not your ways... As high as the heavens are above the earth, my ways are above your ways, my thoughts above your thoughts.'
(Isaiah 55:8-9)

Jesus is the Shepherd. He will guide you. He meets you when you are alone, and guides you. He meets you when you are in a crowd, and guides you.

‘Jesus looked at the people and had compassion on them... they were like sheep without a shepherd.’ (Matthew 9:36)

You were formed in the depths by the hand of God. (Psalm 139:14) Your being and significance continues to be found in God, and God alone. You are never lost to him. Be at peace in this. Be still and know.

We’ve been planted here. We have a mission. It is from the inside out. Jesus in you – he who died and rose again, he who forgives and heals, he who brings peace. We are called to walk with Jesus, and to minister Jesus.

He is in you. (Colossians 1:27) He whispers to you. Your path (and blessings) in Jesus are unique to you, your story. Receive. Rest. Walk. Share.

‘It will be good for that servant whose master finds him faithful when he returns.’
(Matthew 24:46)

I think of Jeremiah the prophet, as someone *'for'* me. His Scriptures and words, from God himself, carry me and carry everyone who reads and believes and accepts. In fact, the Scripture Jeremiah 29:11 is many people's favorite verse.

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'

(Jeremiah 29:11)

But it is interesting to note that Jeremiah was a man who stood alone, and who God even warned would be *'against'* all. Look at this word of God to Jeremiah at the very outset of his ministry, when he was about 17 years old:

'Today I have made you... an iron pillar... to stand against the whole land – against the kings... officials... priests... and the people of the land.'

(Jeremiah 1:18)

As we follow Jesus it can sometimes feel that we are *'against'* the people of the land. We may feel that they are resistant to our faith, our words about Jesus. But, my friend, your faithfulness will not return empty. Your struggle to speak life and live truth, will one day be life to others. In the same way we believe Jeremiah to be *'for'* us, and that his faithfulness (lonely faithfulness) bore so much fruit, so will yours!

'Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.' (Psalm 126:5)

#178

Minister

God is who he is. This is the 'name' he gave himself, actually, when Moses asked him for a name to give the people. God said,

'I am who I am.' (Exodus 3:14)

You have believed in Jesus. You know that he is love, that he is kind and tender. You know that he does ***'hide you in the shadow of his wings.'*** (Psalm 17:8) You have tasted, and you know, that he is good. (Psalm 34:8)

People will question us about our God, and when they do we have two responses to consider. One is to talk *about* God with them. There is a time for this. But another is to *'minister'* God *to* them. For example, when the 'goodness' of God is debated, we might ask – in faith, in humility – *'Would you like to know the goodness of God in your life?'*

When many confusing things about religion and church are being argued, we might ask – in faith, in humility – *'Would you like to know God's peace in your heart and mind?'*

We can't answer for all God's ways and the deceptions and disappointments. But in faith, in humility, we can 'minister' the name and the Holy Spirit of Jesus to anyone who wants it.

'Jesus said, 'Ask and you will receive...''
(Matthew 7:7)

I was reading a book about a little girl in India, from about 100 years ago. A true story. Her name was 'Mimosa', and the story is told by the missionary, Amy Carmichael. Despite the story, and the girl, being extraordinary, and impacting me deeply, here is yet another example of so many, where one forgotten soul impacts thousands of people over thousands of years. The little girl grew to be a woman, died quite young, and her story was never told during her lifetime.

Time and time again Jesus spent quiet and personal time with the individual. And then their story was told, the moment shared. Often it was not even 'with' the individual, but simply 'about' them – like when Jesus saw the poor widow give two mites to the offering, and spoke about her to his disciples, and now to us, two thousand years later.

That one person you touch, you bless, in Jesus' name, that no one else sees or knows about, Jesus sees and speaks about to his Father and to the angels.

'Your Father in heaven sees what is done in secret and will reward you.' (Matthew 6:4,6,18)

'Whoever gives a little one even a cold cup of water in my name, will surely not lose their reward.'
(Matthew 10:42)

Children don't carry the weight of the 'world' on their shoulders. What I mean by this, is if you single out a child and do something special for him or her, they receive, delight, and are excited to show others.

They do not hand it back and say they could not accept your gift because so many others don't have it. They don't hide the news, for fear that others will feel bad or think they are bragging. They see the whole picture through their own experience at that moment, and they run free.

Jesus called us to be like children. (Matthew 18:3)
The little they know is far more truthful than the 'much' we think we know. In our wisdom we lost our innocence - which is far *wiser* than our wisdom.

Jesus even told a story of a man who gave back his 'talent' to the master, quoting philosophical things about justice, injustice, etc. The master saw through it, and said he was ***'lazy and wicked.'*** (Matthew 25:26)

Let Jesus delight you with rest. Let him give you the peace you say you need, you look for. Let him open a new door to you – just you. Let go of all the pressure to answer for God, and just let him be God in your life, in your home, in your decisions and career path...

'A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.'
(Psalm 91:7)

www.1peter1three.weebly.com

www.sharingyourfaith.weebly.com