

This collection contains 5 short devotionals.

FORWARD	26 entries
SEEK	26 entries
MAN CANNOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE	26 entries
SOAR	19 entries
SPIRIT WORD	20 entries

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FORWARD

'...forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.' (Philippians 3:13-14)

I dedicate this devotional to Brad Miller, a good friend and a man of faith and perseverance.

Introduction:

My heart and motif through this devotional is captured in the title word: Forward. The Christian faith is a journey, and it is 'intentional'. There are seasons in life where God **'makes us lie down in green pastures'** (Psalm 23:2), but there are other seasons where we are **'pressing on'** (Philippians 3:12). If you are in a 'pressing on' season, I do hope these devotional entries are of encouragement to you.

There are 26 devotional entries in this publication. Some are light and short (like the last 6, which were copied from my blog, from posts in January 2016). Other entries are almost like mini-studies, and may take a few sittings to get through.

I hope this devotional is something that helps you to get closer to Jesus. Use all the blank spaces to scribble your own notes, thoughts and prayers! I hope and pray that you come 'off the page' and know more of his spirit and his freedom.

God bless you!

#1

'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.' (John 4:34)

We can get low! Have you been low? I was struck today when reading Psalm 42, how the author is actually trying to revive his own soul – speaking to it, questioning it, and admonishing it to put its hope in God. When the true you, the faith you, is pressing and lifting your own soul, you are deep in the center of being.

I also remembered David in 1 Samuel 30:6, where he faced the darkest moment of his 'waiting period', and had to 'encourage himself' in God. No one was there to encourage him, and his closest allies had turned against him. This foreshadows Jesus, perhaps, in the Garden of Gethsemane, left to his darkest moment, and his disciples could not even stay awake with him – and were soon to flee from him. (Matthew 26:36-46)

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, we see that deep-down center at work again, **'taking captive thoughts and making them subject to Christ.'** There is a struggle we are in when we are in Christ. Paul had to **'press on'** (Philippians 3:12-14), and he admonished Timothy to **'fight the fight'** (1 Timothy 6:12), and we are called to **'strive to enter that rest.'** (Hebrews 4:11)

The verse above – John 4:34 – was shared with me today by a brother in church. Amazing how Jesus simply takes his own work and mission (output), and likens it not to expending energy, but to *getting* energy. His output is his means of

input. He is charged in purpose and power by giving and doing – unto death – rather than in ‘eating’ and ‘taking’. Jesus lived this also in defying and overcoming the devil whilst starving on his feet. He put his own power to the side and quoted Deuteronomy from a dry mouth and ravaged body:

‘Man cannot live on bread alone.’

(Matthew 4:1-11; Deuteronomy 8:3)

There is a lot of work upon us in this fallen life, but what is the particular work that the Father has given you? Is there a gifting, a call, that is yours to ‘work’? Don’t be weary this day. Keep your eyes on that particular ‘work’ and keep chugging. His word will never return void in that investment; what you build is eternal. (Galatians 6:9; Isaiah 55:11)

‘Those who sow in tears, will reap with songs of joy.’ (Psalm 126:5)

#2 In Step With The Spirit

'Moses was brought up in all the wisdom of the Egyptians...' (Acts 7:22)

I went to a very secular university, ironically called 'Trinity' (TCD, Dublin, Ireland). My major was languages. I had been a believer in Jesus since a young age, but only following Jesus for a few years. (John 8:31-32)

In university, as a Christian, I struggled with what was 'true'. For example, what 'light' or 'truth' could I derive from a book written by a non-believer? I was studying a lot of texts, even spiritual writings, by authors that were not professed Christians. To cut a long story short – a story of God giving me great release and freedom in this area – I will share just two insights.

First, note the verse above (Acts 7:22). Stephen was making a speech that would end with him being stoned by the listeners. We are told that Stephen was a man full of the spirit of God, and full of wisdom. (Acts 6:5,10) Stephen, in this speech, refers to Moses having been brought up in the '*wisdom*' of the Egyptians. Now remember, the Egyptians were a people who worshipped pagan gods, and opposed God's people vehemently. And yet here, Stephen honors their academic and intellectual '*wisdom*'. This is freeing! And this is a segue to point number two:

C.S. Lewis addresses this very issue in an essay, and he writes (referencing James 1:17), '*God is the God of lights – natural and spiritual.*' Lewis was referring to – and refuting – that every 'true' insight or revelation or fact or figure, must come from Christians. God made all people (Psalm

24:1; Ezekiel 36:26), has put eternity in the hearts of all (Ecclesiastes 3:11), and makes his sun shine on all, rain to fall on all, and speaks to and through all in many ways. (Matthew 5:45)

#3 Good and Noble Person!

This reflection is related to the previous one. It is designed to make sure our 'spiritual' understanding and language, is not confused with 'natural' understanding and language. Ultimately I seek to find more truth and freedom in God here, and to know Him better.

We often hear as Christians the reference to '*no good man*', right? We think of Jesus' words to the 'rich young ruler' who addressed Jesus as '*Good Teacher!*' Jesus replied, saying, '**No one is good, except God alone.**' (Luke 18:19) We think of the famous verse in Jeremiah 17:9, that says the '**heart is deceitful above all things...**' It is important to really note this spiritual truth, and to 'distrust' the heart, because we are told that even our heart can condemn us in 1 John 3:20.

However, there is another side to life, to the 'natural', that is also true. In God's word we are told that Barnabas was a '**good man.**' (Acts 11:24) We are also given deep insight to a real, and spiritually significant 'fear of God' that can be in the heart and faith of those who do not yet know Jesus; Peter tells Cornelius, '**God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.**' (Acts 10:31)

The opposite is also true. God refers in his word to '*jealous*' people and '*bad characters*' (Acts 17:5), and even to some people being '*more noble*' than others. (Acts 17:11) In the 'natural', there are some 'bad' people out there, that stand out from others. So it is OK at times, and not always 'judgmental', to consider some people as tending towards 'good' and some others as choosing and tending towards 'bad'.

Do you know any 'good' people that are not Christians? Ask God in prayer today to reveal himself to them, the same way He moved close to Cornelius. Do you know any that are 'bad' and in need of a powerful intervention by God? Pray today for this person, and ask God to step in and convict the heart of sin. (John 16:8)

#4

'God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.'

(Romans 9:18)

This scripture is one of great debate, even in the book of Romans where it is written. But I want to focus on the very good news of this verse, of the truth of God's power in this.

The very essence of the gospel message is that God 'deletes', so to speak, our sin, our past. It is as if we never sinned. We are told in Isaiah 1:18 that God takes our blood stains and makes them like snow. We see a picture of a man, God, who has our names cut into the palm of his hand, and this blood is not death, but life. (Isaiah 49:16; Hebrews 12:24) Jesus not only carried our sin to the cross, as we are told in 2 Peter 2:24, but he *'became sin'* on the cross. (2 Corinthians 5:21) The mysteries, blood battles and miracles of our sin *not* counting against us, is from the same power – and 'injustice', so to speak – that Romans 9:18 speaks of.

Today I was thinking on the harrowing latter years of king David's life. God had decreed after David's debacle with Bathsheba and Uriah, that David's own wives would be abused in the light of day. (2 Samuel 12:11) What a horror! And this unfolded in painful detail over the next 10 chapters. I found myself wondering if God, although he decreed this thing, might have changed his mind and 'deleted' the consequence that was deserved, that he decreed – the same way he changed the course and deserved consequences of my sin. God put my sin and its consequences on another,

on Christ, and I wondered if there was any way David might have averted this consequence, by moving in on God as did Moses (Exodus 33), as did the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) – and cried out to God that his mercy in this time might triumph over his judgment. (James 2:13)

And then there's my life! I wonder if at this time – appealing to all that God is, and his right and power to 'have mercy on whom he has mercy', God will straighten a path that I have twisted and torn, and make me something I am not, give me something I do not deserve!

'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.' (Jeremiah 33:3)

#5 What's Really Real?!

I was going to speak to a youth group that coming Sunday. I had actually been asked months before, and had been actively preparing, praying, anticipating for weeks. The Lord had given me a message, a heart, a mission. My day job at this time was teaching Spanish in high school. On Wednesday a student came in and said to me,

'Mr. Walker, forecast says snow on Sunday evening!' My heart dropped a little. I checked online, and sure enough, Sunday from about noon the snow was forecasted to fall...

So I began to think and pray. My heart believed that I should stand against this 'design' of the enemy to discourage and diminish the purposes of the Lord. As I prayed, I saw the snowflake symbol of the weather forecast in my mind's eye. I then saw the 'fire' of the word of the Lord. (Jeremiah 20:9) I saw this fire meet the snow, and the snowflake melt to water. But not only that, the heat of the fire evaporated the water and it rose to the heavens and then fell as water – nourishing water, to grow truth, hearts and faith. The fire overcame the ice, and turned it to good...

Then I pondered the issue of what's *really* real in this life. What is the nature of truth? We are told that the church displays the wisdom of God to the heavenly bodies (Ephesians 3:10), and that our lives are an aroma to God (2 Corinthians 2:15), and that God's love is better than life (Psalm 63:3), that knowing Christ is not just *for* eternal life, but *is* eternal life (John 17:3).

The snow held off and we had a great meeting on Sunday night!

'We take captive thoughts and make them subject to Christ.' (2 Corinthians 10:4)

#6 You Are!

This statement is technically a correct sentence (subject and verb, and all that...), but it can feel incomplete. However, this statement has the potential to completely revolutionize your life! It all depends on who is saying it, what spirit it carries, and if it really lands on your soul.

God defined himself, when asked by Moses for an 'identity' to give his people, as the great '**I AM**'. (Exodus 3:14) This is the purest place, space and 'heart' of God's person. God is being, and out of this being comes all other attributes of being – strength, beauty, truth, etc.

A parallel I draw here is along the lines of the nature of the gospel, as we see in Galatians chapter 3. The gospel does not come *after* the law and fix things, forgive things, etc. The true gospel comes 430 years *before* the law, when God promised his 'seed' to Abraham, which Paul tells us is Christ. The gospel comes before the law was defined, and God's name – your name – comes before any attributes of your name. This is deep stuff, but it is unshakeable.

Jesus wanted us to really 'hear' his word, and told us that his words were '**spirit and life.**' (John 6:63) Jesus came not to get us into the Word, but to get the Living Word into us. Jesus wants to get us off the page and into Spirit, the same way he came off the 'word', so to speak, and was made 'flesh'. (John 1:14) Jesus then stepped himself into the eternal name of God, by saying, '**Before Abraham was, I AM.**' (John 10:30/Exodus 3:14)

We are told by Jesus that God is spirit, and he looks for 'spirit worshippers'. (John 4:24) Your

real name – **'secret name'** (Revelation 2:17) – is detached from your own understanding, your past sin, your future foibles. This is good news! This is why Paul would not even judge himself (1 Corinthians 4:3-4) and why you are completely free and empowered to be who it is Jesus says you are.

#7 Meditate on the Word

I have struggled with the concept and discipline of 'meditating' on the Word. It is a little like the challenging concept of 'prayer': Jesus said we would not be heard for our many words (Matthew 6:7), but he also admonished us to persist (Luke 18:1-7; Philippians 4:6-7). He modeled a prayer for us (Matthew 6:9-13), but does not look for mindless repetition.

Prayer that honors God is like anything that honors God – it comes in faith, believing (James 1:6; Hebrews 11:6), and it comes from a love of God that is first and foremost in our lives. (Matthew 22:36-40) This disposition in our prayers and prayer life is not really a 'state of mind' when we pray, but a life we live. It is the righteous man's prayer that is effective, because it comes from the righteous man. (James 5:16)

Sometimes I find myself staring at Scripture, trying to 'meditate' but really just zoning in and out. I find myself praying like that, too, sometimes. I think the key to a deeper prayer life, and more real 'motive' and driver to meditate on God's Word, comes directly from following command number one and command number two from Jesus:

'Love God with all your heart...' (Matthew 22:36-40) If we really want to know God, we will find ourselves 'meditating' on some Scriptures, trying to see God in them. Not just the verses 'about' God, but the stories in which God acted and reacted.

I have recently been stunned and stopped and even emotionally affected as I grapple with God in

and through the second book of Samuel. What can I learn about God here? I cannot just have simple answers as I consider God's discipline and justice in these Old Testament stories, I need deep, 'spirit' insights. I need to get beyond the mind to the 'spirit' of truth. (cf John 6:63; John 4:24) I need to see this truth, also, in light of what I know elsewhere, like the mercies and answers to prayer I see in Matthew 15:21-28, John 20:11-18, Mark 11:1-11, etc. There are scriptures that appear to contradict each other (e.g. 2 Samuel 24:1 & 1 Chronicles 21:1), and so we gaze deep into things, not for more 'head' knowledge' but for more 'heart knowledge'. We listen to the 'deep' not with words but in the '**roar of your waterfalls.**' (Psalm 42:7)

Paul himself urges people to let their love abound (grow, expand) through '**knowledge and depth of insight**' (Philippians 1:9), but with the purpose of 'purity' and 'discernment'. (see vs. 10) Does your 'knowledge' result in pride (1 Corinthians 8:1), or more clear vision, purity and '**fruit of righteousness**'? (Philippians 1:9-11)

Jesus knew scripture. He must have meditated on it carefully. He quotes deep, insightful scriptures with subtle and Spirit-filled intentions. There are many instances of this, but I love John 10:34, where Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6 (*check it out, and consider why Jesus quoted this particular scripture*). And this is an important segue. The second-most important command that Jesus gave us was:

'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Matthew 22:36-40/Leviticus 19:18)

If we are actively loving God, and actively taking

his love and gospel to people around us, we will need God's Word for others. We are told that the Holy Spirit will **'recall to our minds what Jesus taught us'** (John 14:26), and for this we need to meditate on, and really 'know' his words, the same way Jesus knew God's Word. (see *Jesus' profound and concerted learning evidenced in Matthew 4:1-11*)

Jesus told us that his words were **'spirit and life'**, and in order to absorb the spirit of his teaching, we need to sink in, past the words themselves.

Yesterday I was struck at just how much Paul was 'soaked' in the spirit and the 'letter' of the Scriptures. I was reading Galatians chapter 3, and I encourage you to look carefully through this chapter. Paul cites very key – and not obvious - Scriptures in Deuteronomy, Genesis and Leviticus. Through Paul's 'meditation' and getting to the 'spirit' of the Word, he carefully situates the gospel 430 years before the law was given. This is thrilling stuff, and comes through a heart after God, a mind that has meditated on God's Word.

'He will seek me and he will find me, when he seeks me with all his heart.' (Jeremiah 29:13)

'Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls.' (Psalm 42:7)

Many people block out noise with noise. This is called 'white noise'. You can buy 'white noise' machines, or CDs, to help you sleep at night. It is like the soothing sound of the sea when you are near it. It brings such peace and tranquility, but it is actually quite loud if you focus on the noise alone.

When I was a kid I lived on a ship, and there was always the background noise of the ship's generator. So now, if I am near a relatively loud, consistent humming sound of machinery, it is not a nuisance to me, but a type of white noise that I find calming, it blocks out the other noise – and thoughts – of life.

Jesus said that his words were **'spirit and life.'** (John 6:63) Sometimes more 'talk' and even 'thoughts' are just too tiring, too one-dimensional. We need that thing that comes off the page. We need wind. We need waves. The rest of the above verse – Psalm 42:7 - reads, **'All your waves and breakers have swept over me.'** I love this image of being 'caught up' and swirled around in truth and song, a rushing wind, a roaring sound...

Jesus told us that when we believed in him, **'streams of living water would flow from within us.'** (John 7:37-38) He also told us that to be born of the spirit would be **'like the wind.'** (John 3:8) Jesus gave us images of **'going in and out and finding pasture.'** (John 10:9) This is intoxicating, gets us away from the mundane

and takes us into hiding, a spirit place. Maybe today you are in need of God's Spirit, not more words. If you need this refreshing of your soul, and a new revelation to light your eyes, know that this is what God wants to give you! We are told in the book of Daniel that God reveals ***'deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness and light dwells with him.'*** (Daniel 2:22)

Close your eyes, and sit with the Spirit of God for a few minutes. Just gaze with your heart's eyes, with a still and quiet mind, on the light of God. Let him lift you and up and sweep you away.

'You are my hiding place... You will surround me with songs of deliverance.' (Psalm 32:7)

'The sorcerers did the same with their secret arts... each one threw down his staff, and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.' (Exodus 7:11-12)

The tension at this moment must have been thick. God had said to Moses that he would be ***'like God to Pharaoh.'*** (vs.1) That is a powerful statement. If it had not been God who said it, it would be like blasphemy. God told Moses that Pharaoh would ask for a miracle, and Aaron was to throw down his staff, and it would become a serpent.

But stop here for a minute. God did *not* tell Moses that when he did this, the sorcerers and 'wise men' of Egypt would also turn their staffs into serpents. Why did God not tell Moses this would happen? I believe when this did happen, for a split second, Moses' heart turned to wax - when his 'miracle' looked no more powerful than what Pharaoh's sorcerers could do. If Moses did not bring something of greater power, then his God was no greater than Pharaoh.

It is also important to note the spiritual war on display here. Moses was standing in the courts of a king who could turn sticks into snakes. This is deep darkness.

You know, we, too, in this world and in our walk with Jesus, are in the courts of a dark spirit that can work wonders. There will be times when your 'power' appears to be matched by the enemy; when your wisdom appears to be less than the world's, when your strength and heart fail in battle, when your song and symphony feel like

only a whisper. It will appear for a moment – when there are three serpents on the floor – that God himself has left you alone, vulnerable to the ridicule and even attack of the enemy.

But wait. Hold your ground here! Don't doubt the voice you know. (John 10:27) Don't doubt the prophecy, gift and call you have received! (2 Timothy 1:6) This is the moment of faith. This is when we see God move. We are called to create space for this (Luke 21:14-15), and we are told that **'Without faith it is impossible to please God.'** (Hebrews 11:6)

Jesus will let the winds blow sometimes, so strongly that even as you walk on water you will doubt God. (Matthew 14:22- 32) At the very point you feel all hope has been lost – like at the point of crucifixion – you are on the brink of resurrection. You will see your serpent – your God - swallow up the other serpents.

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.' (Matthew 28:18)

#10 Faith Is Our Part

'All I ask is that they be silent.' (Exodus 14:14)

All things are from God, including creation (Genesis 1; John 1:1-5), and our flesh and spirits. (Ecclesiastes 12:1,7) We are told in Colossians and Hebrews that God's word sustains us, keeps everything existing. (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:3)

We are told that without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6) Why does God care so much about faith? Well, really our 'faith' is the only thing that we can give God. Our faith is our heart. Our faith is our soul. Our faith is our sincerity.

Think about it: there is no temple or structure or sacrifice that is not already his, or does not come from his power and construction. (Hebrews 3:4) My youngest daughter told me she really wanted to buy me something, but she needed me to give her money first. Now in this scenario, it was not the gift that meant anything to me, because I bought it. It was the 'heart' that wanted to buy me a gift.

'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have opened; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.' (Psalm 40:6)

'For you do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; you are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.' (Psalm 51:16-17)

#11 *My Gift, my Call*

The apostle Paul – author of 13 books in the New Testament – was at times insecure about his gifting and his call. I think of the fear he expresses when he was dealing with the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 7:5), and how he wondered if he **'had run his race in vain'** fourteen years into his ministry! (Galatians 2:1-2)

There were others who doubted their 'call', even after mighty evidence and a track record of their service and impact. John the Baptist had finished his race, his ministry, and then doubted Jesus. (Matthew 11:1- 11) Elijah had just displayed mighty miracles of God, killing 900 false prophets and calling down fire from heaven, and rain from the sky, and then he ran away and said to God, **'I cannot stand it anymore...'** (1 Kings 19:4) Moses **'broke faith'** with God before the people (Deuteronomy 32:51) and David broke under temptation, and committed adultery with the wife of one of his most trusted – and trusting – warriors. (2 Samuel 11:3; 23:39)

Jesus had very special, gracious responses to those who doubted themselves, and doubted God in their journey.¹ If you doubt and struggle with your own purpose, call, gifting, you are standing on the shoulder of giants! Persevere. Lift your head and heart today, and soldier on. You are on course!

¹ Ponder God's 'way' with Moses, Elijah, David and John, by looking carefully at these scriptures: Matthew 17:3, Matthew 11:11, 2 Samuel 23:5

#12 *Christ in Me in Christ*

The question is not what you have, or what opportunities are open to you, etc. The question is: *What is Christ doing in your life, and what are you doing with what he is doing?*

Jesus tells a compelling story of the 'Talents' (a talent was worth about 20 years wages – Matthew 25:14-30). Here a master gives each of three servants a particular allotment, or number of talents, and asks them to steward their portion accordingly.

One man got 1 talent, another got 2, and the last got 5 talents. Different portions to different people, and therefore different possibilities and responsibilities. Long story short, the man with 5 doubled his portion, as did the man with 2, but the man with only 1 talent buried his, did nothing with it. When the master returned, the man who only had 1 talent, rationalized, philosophized with the master, saying that he knew he was a hard man, reaping where he did not sow, etc. The master did not deny this claim or how it must be perceived to the servant. The master drew a different conclusion, however:

'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money...' (Matthew 25:26-27)

I find it so interesting in this parable that it is the man with comparatively less than others, that does so little with what he has. And yet this man with only 1 talent – lesser than what his colleagues received – still was being handed a huge amount of resources and huge amount of

responsibility - 20 years' worth of wages. Rather than asking himself what it was he *had* been handed by his master, and what it was that he should do to honor this trust, he devalued what was given him, and did nothing.

If we would not 'covet' what our neighbor has, and simply look to invest what it is we have been given, we will know God's voice and path in our life. It is not what we accomplish, exactly, that matters, it is that we have been in step with the Spirit of God in our lives. (Galatians 5:25)

The master's words to the servants that had invested and doubled their portion:

'His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' (Matthew 25:21)

'God has allotted to each a measure of faith.'
(Romans 12:3)

'Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' (Matthew 6:4)

As Christians we can feel a lot of pressure – both in the world, and in church! A community is a community, and people are people, and hearts are hearts. We care what others think, and we judge one another. I think of the parallel with family and neighbors. With neighbors we have one set of challenges, but behind closed doors with family - and also with our faith family - we have another set of challenges.

I grew up as a 'missionary kid', and found myself in some very big 'Christian' communities and gatherings. As a family we lived on ships for 4 years, with a community of 250 Christians. I attended conferences regularly, with up to 10 thousand people. Life is life, right? Work needs to be done, food cooked, problems addressed; personalities and nationalities differ, perspectives differ, sin happens, trust is broken, etc. We have Jesus in common, praise God, but 'family' challenges – in faith and life – are real! There is unkindness, loneliness, and insecurity. In our church family we can also experience a sense of being 'lost', or 'less' or even lonely.

One Scripture that impacts me greatly is when Elijah, a great prophet of God, had grown weary, and cried out to God, ***'I can't take it anymore!'*** (1 Kings 19:4) God moved gently towards Elijah, and wanted to speak with him. While waiting to hear the voice of God a number of 'God- sized' sounds and signs happened, but we are told the ***'Lord was not in them.'*** (1 Kings 19:17-19) There was rushing wind and thunderous noise... but the

actual voice of God, the move of God, the call of God, came in the ***'whisper'***.

You may sometimes be surrounded by a lot of noise and 'signs' and stuff... but God has not forgotten you. You might stand alone, but you are not alone. You might be with brothers, but you, too, are a child of God. He may be speaking to just you in a whisper. This whisper is far more powerful and important when it comes, than any other noise and power on display. Do not be distracted, keep your eyes fixed, and listen for the Lord's voice.

'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 only do what I see my Father doing.'

(John 5:19)

Today I was sitting in traffic, thinking about the homeless and needy. I wondered what would happen if I opened my home to 1, to 2, to 5, to 100... Why would I not just do this, go for it?! Do you ever 'feel' this, or think this type of thing? Well, the verse above is a very important reason why I would not, and should not.

Jesus said that he did 'life' and good works by keeping his eyes on his Father, and doing what His Father did. This is how Jesus would 'select' one individual to heal, for example, when there were many in need of healing. (Matthew 5:1-15) Jesus was always kept in perfect peace, because his mind was ***'stayed on the Lord.'*** (Isaiah 26:3) Jesus never panicked, even when he felt 'compassion' for those around him. (Matthew 9:36) Jesus had seasons where he healed all those who came to him (Matthew 15:30), but then other times he left the crowds and went to find some rest. (Mark 6:31) Because of the presence, the lead, the Spirit of God in and through Christ, in the very midst of poverty and need he could allow himself be anointed with a perfume worth a year's wages. (Mark 14:7)

We do need to love God with all our hearts, and seek to 'feel' what he feels, and serve and reach the lost. (Luke 19:10) But we cannot even *serve* God without God's Spirit coming to and through us. It is more of a 'singing along' than a 'singing for', when it comes to doing God's will.

God may call you and lead you to open your

home to 100+ people. And if He does, he will give you the grace, provision, confirmation and support for this mission. But beware of 'theory' over 'Spirit'. Don't let the enemy enslave you with, *'if you really were a Christian you would...'* No! The devil tried this very strategy with Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11. You need to do as Jesus did, and listen for the lead of the Father in all you do. This will not make perfect rational or philosophical sense, sometimes, but it comes with ***'perfect peace.'***

'By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life.' (Psalm 42:8)

#15 Glimpse of Heaven

'Without a vision, the people perish.'

(Proverbs 29:18)

Moses could only go on in his mission, his call, his life, if he was given a fresh glimpse of God's glory. (Exodus 33:18) He needed the light of God in his eyes. Paul, a man of powerful suffering and sacrifice for the gospel, was ***'caught up into heaven'***, and given powerful re-envisioning for his walk and ministry. (2 Corinthians 12) Elijah was weary, and God moved close to him in a whisper, and in raising up support for him. (1 Kings 19).

Jesus himself told us that the ***'eye was the lamp of the body'***, and that through it we would either be filled with light, or filled with darkness.

(Matthew 6:23) We are told that Jesus is the ***'true light'*** (John 1:9), that this ***'light is life'*** (John 1:5), and that in Christ we, too, will be ***'light to the world.'*** (Matthew 5:14)

Jesus, because of the ***'joy set before him'*** (Hebrews 12:2), and because he had ***'seen the light of life'*** (Isaiah 53:11), was able to ***'endure the cross'***. It is a powerful vision in one's eyes that will hold a man's course through crucifixion!

What light is in your eyes today? Do you, like me, need a fresh vision of the eternal, of the very gardens and landscapes of heaven? Ask God today to show you a glimpse of heaven, to let you feel the spray of the river of life that runs through that city.

'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the

middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 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. And they will reign for ever and ever.' (Revelation 22:1-5)

#16 STRONGHOLDS

'The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.'

(2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Strongholds are in the mind and heart. And from the overflow of the heart, not only does the mouth speak, but the person thinks, feels and acts.

(Luke 6:45; Matthew 15:11) We all carry around with us, as the Scripture above sets out, strongholds that set themselves up ***'against... the knowledge of God.'***

Paul had his sights on breaking through darkness in other people's lives. But Paul was on guard against 'strongholds' in his own life. For this reason he distrusted others' judgments about him, and his own judgment about himself. (1 Corinthians 4:3-4) Because of our brokenness and strongholds, there is a time to not trust even our own hearts. (1 John 3:20; Jeremiah 17:9)

Listen, the devil is going to lie to you (John 8:44), and he is going to try to deceive you. (2 Corinthians 11:14) This last verse tells us that he will even ***'masquerade'*** – or dress up – as an ***'angel of light'***. Paul, after glorious revelation, perhaps the most stunning and intoxicating of his life, was left with a ***'thorn in his side.'*** (2 Corinthians 12). What a disappointing 'residue' or aftertaste to be left with after your highest high! Have you ever come away from 'encouragement' and been left with a 'thorn in your side'? Ask God

to take it away – as did Paul – and maybe even reach to bind it by the **'blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony.'** (Revelation 12:11)

But also consider this: it was God that allowed this particular thorn in Paul's side. This was not a 'sin' stronghold of Paul's. This struggle did have a divine purpose - **'that he would not become conceited'** after his glorious revelations. (vs. 7)

Maybe you have a struggle today. By all means ask God to take it away! But also consider carefully, if in this place of struggle God is calling you to reach an even deeper level with him, holding not to a 'high' or to a healing, but to his 'grace', which is 'sufficient' for you here. God's grace is the trap door after highs and lows – to the safest of places, to heaven itself.

'Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.'
(2 Corinthians 12:8-9)

#17 Ranking

There is so much in life that demands our attention, and even our expertise. We seem to *have to* know about this, and about this, and about this... for work, for our kids' education, for politics, for the community... But something has got to calibrate, and stack up our priorities. Something has got to be #1!

Jesus gives us such freedom in this area. He calls us to first and foremost, focus on 'knowing' Him. When asked what the 'greatest commandment' was, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy and said it was this (note how much of 'you' this calls for): ***'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength.'*** (Matthew 22:36-40) When I read this verse, and let it sit with me for a minute, other areas of life fall to a lesser ranking. I do not, in fact, need to be expert on much outside of knowing and loving God.

There is a time, as a brother once told me, to *'Let go, and let God!'* God can take the little you know about other stuff, and make it very effective. If you give God your #1 ranking in life, and spend the best of your time, soul, mind and strength on him, he can and will bless your other areas of expertise.

The opposite is also true. You could choose to neglect God, and go for gold in all other areas, but this does not guarantee success. After all this investment and toil and neglect of God, you might look and watch this 'expertise' ebb away in a crashed stock market, a crashed car, one quick and comprehensive house fire. If you want God to ***'establish the works of your hands'*** – as Moses

prayed in Psalm 90:17 – then you need to know, love and lean on God.

‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’
(Matthew 6:19-21)

‘One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.’ (Proverbs 11:24)

'My power is made perfect in weakness.'

(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Today I was thinking about some of my own heart for the Lord, and the compassion I feel and the message I share. I realized that much of my 'message' (Colossians 4:3), comes from sin and regret in my own life – and God's mercy poured out on me in that place.

Now there is a 'mystery' here. If God uses my brokenness and past rebellion to fashion in me a message of compassion for others, was this past sin and rebellion something that needed to happen in my story? The answer is *'No!'* God never causes sin, nor needs it to accomplish any story. Here is where philosophy and even reason, must bend and break before God's truth.

Although God uses the weakest part of us for a new song, a new testimony and destiny, he did not *purpose* our sin for this. Let us not confuse God's most amazing powers to redeem, as having needed our sin and rebellion for our story! (Romans 8:28; Ezekiel 36:26; Isaiah 1:18)

As I pondered my own story, I realized that God often made a man's mission out of his brokenness. Again, was this because God needs brokenness, or causes brokenness? *No!* God works this way ***'...to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy.'*** (Romans 9:23) Regarding our sin and temptation – that brought us to a place in desperate need of his mercy – we are reminded,

'When tempted, no one should say, 'God is

tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.’ (James 1:13)

Moses had killed an Egyptian with his own hands, and then fled. After many years, God called Moses back to this same battle and cause – i.e. to free the Israelites - but this time not in Moses’ strength. (Exodus 2-3) Paul was persecuting the church and putting Christians to death; then God called him to *build* the church, and put his own ‘flesh’ to death. (Acts 8:1-3; Galatians 2:20) Peter denied Christ, and God calls him – uses him - to admonish others to *not deny* Christ. (John 18:15-27; 1 Peter 3:15). More recently, Nicky Cruz was a gang member involved in many crimes and much bloodshed, and now God uses him powerfully to reach other gang members.

I believe God works like this – building on the very heart of our weakness – so that the building structure rests on a testimony of God’s faithfulness to us, rather than on a testimony of our faithfulness to God. (2 Timothy 2:19)

‘For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and we as your servants.’
(2 Corinthians 4:5)

'My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.'

(1 John 2:1-2)

This verse captures a key balance in the gospel – it calls for 'goodness', but pardons our 'badness'. This would be a great verse to learn by heart! *(And a good way to start that process, is to write it on an index card and stick it on the fridge, or by your bed)*

In Ephesians we are also told that we are not saved by good works, but we are saved *for* good works. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

The gospel – and grace of Jesus Christ – should never be used as 'license' to sin. (Jude 1:4) We are told in Titus 2:12 that God's grace ***'teaches us to say, 'No!' to ungodliness...'*** All this said, however, ***'...but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.'*** (1 John 2:1)

One more aspect of this verse: not only are we reminded that in our sin Jesus Christ advocates for us with the Father, but we are reminded about the powerfully spiritual truth that makes this possible – that he was a 'sacrifice' and his blood 'atoned' for our sin. This is such a stunning image of the spiritual nature of this story, this gospel! This verse does not stop here. After breaking us into the 'spiritual' nature of this gospel message, we are then taken 'universal', so to speak, and

told that the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient to cover *all* sins of *all* people of all time: ***‘... and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.’***

For this reason, after dying – and while his body lay in the grave – Jesus in spirit descended into hell and preached to souls who had been disobedient in the past. (1 Peter 3:20) This is a stunning message, my brothers and sisters, and reaches even to past, lost souls.

‘For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.’ (2 Timothy 1:7)

'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.' (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Jesus is not after what we see, but *how* we see. We are told there are different 'lights' that can light our eyes, and so light our being and our path. In Matthew 6:23 Jesus says,

'If your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!'

Note in above verse that there is a 'light' that can be darkness (***'If.. the light within you is darkness...'***). Darkness is the 'lamp' or the light that guides many.

We are told that Jesus is the ***'true light'***, contrasting with the notion of a 'false' light. (John 1:9) We are also told that the ***'life'*** in Jesus is the ***'light of all mankind.'*** (John 1:4)

Jesus wants us to 'see' and know truth. But he wants our very 'seeing' to be and bring a light of truth. As we are told in Titus 1:15, ***'to the pure all things are pure.'***

If our 'sight' is true, it filters out false in what it sees. Have you ever not picked up on an immoral nuance in a joke? You heard the joke – every word in it – just like everyone else, but because your 'hearing' or the very spirit of how you hear was calibrated differently, the false and the immoral aspect of what was said did not land on

your heart, your mind, your soul.

We need Jesus to 'heal our land', as the above Scripture reads. (2 Chronicles 7:14) People are crying out to not only see and hear truth, but to have the very essence and spirit of truth '**sweep over them.**' (Psalm 42:7) Pray today that God will calibrate the light in your eyes, and also touch the heart and 'eyes' of hurting people around you.

#21 Walk on Water

You know the story of Jesus walking on water, and of Peter walking on water to him. (Matthew 14:22-32) But only recently it struck me that Peter actually asked Jesus to call him out on the water. This was Peter's idea, his goal, his prayer. Why?

It was not enough for Peter to just see Christ walking on water. Peter wanted to be in and of this power of God. He wanted to partake, to taste of the miraculous. He wanted to touch the eternal. The normal order of things, to swim and sink in the waves, was all too familiar to Peter. He longed, now, to see God's kingdom come in his own life, to touch God through Christ.

'He will seek me and he will find me, when he seeks me with all his heart.' (Jeremiah 29:13)

#22 **'What Is Truth?'**

Pilate asked this question directly to Jesus. (John 18:38) What a powerful question! Do you have an answer? If you do not have a 'cornerstone' of truth, how do you measure and define anything true? What's your yardstick, your authority?

'God has set eternity in the hearts of men.' (Ecclesiastes 3:11) This is where real truth and falsehood matters – in the heart and souls of each one of us. Jesus is referred to as the **'cornerstone'** of truth (Luke 20:17-18; John 14:6), and he also claimed to be 'truth' itself. (John 8:58; Exodus 3:14; John 14:6). Truth is a person, and *through* this person. (John 10:9)

Here's what is so poignant and powerful about Pilate's question: Jesus was standing before him, and had just said to him in the previous verse: **'Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'** (vs. 37)

#23 Super Hero 'B'

I was recently watching a conference speaker prepare, and saw how he feared, and was in need of reassurance. Maybe you have experienced this? A crowd awaits (or maybe just one family member), the moment has arrived... and your heart fails.

So this guy needed reassurance. But, you can't 're-' anything that has not already been. By definition, to re-assure, is to assure *again* of what has already been assured. So what this guy needed was to see again, feel again, and take hold of with conviction, the truth about himself, his role, and his 'call' to this speaking. He needed to be reassured, as it were, about who he was. He needed a 'BEING' hero, to come to his rescue.

Jesus put his life in danger by putting his own self in the '*being*' of God. One of the most impactful times he did this was when he said, '**Before Abraham was, I am.**' (John 8:58) This was Jesus, claiming the great '**I AM**' of Exodus 3:14 – the name and presence of God to lead his people.

Jesus is the '**author and finisher of faith**' (Hebrews 12:2), through whom all things were created (John 1:1- 5), the sustainer of all life. (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:15-20) He is the champion of your true self.

#24 Naysayer

Everything can be denied. Not just facts and figures, but emotions, rights, interpretations, even grounds for a sense of self, a sense of peace. A solid and malicious 'No!' and 'Not so!' can breathe against the ground you stand on.

Two thoughts on this: First, we can be caught in a 'justification' trap when this happens. Our minds will scramble to find the grounds for 'Yes!' and 'This can be!' We will scan and interpret and 'deserve' this and 'be owed' that... and we grow weary, because every 'yes' you define, can be 'no-d' by another – another person, or another reason, or a different vantage point. Self-justifying is a trap the naysayer wants you to fall into. It is the pit with no bottom.

Secondly, if a 'No!' can undermine the floor of existence, from where derives the 'Yes!' of all things created, all things true? Your justifications find no floor, and yet there must be truth even as there is dirt beneath our feet. Who speaks the 'Yes!' that is true? I leave you with these most powerful verses, written by an unschooled fisherman, but who the scholars recognized had '**walked with Christ.**' (Acts 4:13):

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' (John 1:1-5)

#25 'Could' Is a Curse

I'm not talking here about chanting oneself into competence ('*Yes I can! Yes I can!*'), though there is a time for that. I'm talking about possibilities that we fear, not that we want. We do not know what tomorrow may bring, and sometimes that unknown brings a ray of hope and anticipation – new job, house, relationship, horizons.

Other times, however, it strikes fear into our hearts – will I be diagnosed with something? Will I lose someone? This can feel like Dylan's '*cold, black cloud... comin' down.*'

The reality is that no mortal can assure you of safety tomorrow (or later today). And even if you could 'control' for tomorrow, our lives themselves are on a countdown, right? We know this. We feel this. There is a critical sense of the 'mortal' and the 'finite' that we must face, and deal with.

I want to defer to you for consideration two truths that come to us from Jesus Christ. First, he addressed this issue of the 'hereafter', and offered us an assurance of rising from the dead, and living in heaven for evermore. (*John 11:25-26; John 14:1-6; Revelation 21:1-5; Revelation 22:1-5*)

When we place our trust in Jesus, and he fills us with his Spirit, we 'feel' this assurance, we know that despite what comes on this troubled earth, we will eventually '*cross that river*' and enter into everlasting life.

Secondly, Jesus truly moves to touch and talk to you here, now. He said he was a '**friend**' to us. (John 15:15) Do you need a true friend? Jesus said that his Spirit would fill us and '**teach us all**

things.' (John 14:26) Jesus can come and whisper truth and reassurance to you even here, this side of glory, to take away your fears, and give you some light on what you really can expect today, and tomorrow. His eternal peace starts even now.

Do you need this peace?

'He who believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within him.' (John 7:38)

#26 New Footing

So things are bad! No one quite gets you or your situation. People are misjudging, misunderstanding... The dark reality is that not even you get you at this point, and things still sink lower... Maybe they were right, after all, or maybe the gods are against you...

One of the most powerful, spiritual truths that Jesus imparted to us was a fresh start, a '*new footing*'. Jesus met people in their darkest hour and broke their chains and set them free. (Luke 4:18) Even to the culprit, deep in sin and surrounded by accusation, Jesus forgave, and sent them walking on a new path. (John 8:1-11) Jesus gave us himself as a '**cornerstone**' for a new build. (Luke 20:17-18)

Jesus is not a religion, nor his words philosophical guides. Jesus was the living God made flesh. (John 1:14) Jesus told us that he was a '**door**' to salvation, that anyone who believed in him 'crossed' into eternal life. (John 5:24; 10:9) Jesus was spirit made flesh, and then, as it were, was flesh made Spirit again. (John 14:26; 16:7)

If you believe on Jesus and call out to him, he will pour out his Spirit on you; and this Spirit is the foundation of your '*new footing*' today.

'His mercies are new every morning.'
(Lamentations 3:23)

(End of Devotional: Forward)

SEEK

'I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.' (Acts 20:24)

I dedicate this devotional to my father, Mickey Walker, a man who seeks God, and loves people.

Introduction:

I love Psalm 27:4 where David asks the Lord for only one thing – to be in the courts of God so that he can gaze on him and 'seek' him. Don't we only seek what we have not yet found? Not when it comes to knowing God. He is eternal. He is spirit. (John 4:24) He is timeless. I think of seeing God like seeing the galaxy: your vision never quite falls on 'it', so to speak, but falls *into* it, and goes on and on... To seek him is to see him.

So when we 'know' God through Jesus Christ, and when we 'see' him and 'share' him, we are also 'seeking' to know him. In fact, 'seeking' God when with people, is the best way to share him. Paul, in the middle of his thickest theological explanations, falls into a 'doxology' of declaring how beyond our explanation God is. (Romans 11:33-36) Moses, the closest man to God, after days of direct dialogue with God, asks to be closer still, to 'see' more: **'Now show me your glory.'** (Exodus 33:18)

I always associated the strain of seeking God with what lay ahead, what I was trying to see and grasp, like straining my eyes. But more recently I was struck by a new understanding. The strain I

feel in seeking God, is the pull of my flesh and pride to hold me in the 'know', in the 'now', in my 'understanding', in my earthly terms of being. The strain is behind me, not before me.

To seek God, is to pull away from the old self and be free. To seek God, is to step off the page of Jesus' written words, and access the essence of those words, which Jesus told us were '**spirit and life.**' (John 6:63) We will cease seeking God only when we see him face to face, or if we fail to see any of his face now.

#1 Promises

Stand and speak this day the promises and truths about God. You will experience something mighty. You will feel that your foot is, indeed, planted in another kingdom. You will feel the truths of God bend and crack the reports of this concrete, mortal life. You will see come to light the floor of faith beneath the floor of earth, and you will glimpse heaven. Let's do this together:

'Jesus, we believe you are the Son of God. We believe you died, and came back to life, and will raise us back to life. We believe you are making all things new, even now, even here in my soul, and forevermore. We believe, Lord, that you are just, that you do hear the cry of the broken heart, and that you do respond. We believe that to call on you is powerful. We believe your name is the door of salvation to all. We believe, Lord, that your gospel is the hope of our own soul this day. We believe you pour out your Spirit on us, and that we do know your voice. We believe that your gospel is the hope of all peoples in all nations, and that in you alone is forgiveness of sin. We believe, Lord, that you are with us. You are our friend, Lord, our very best and most real friend. Thank you, Jesus, amen and amen.

(John 11:25-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 21:5; Colossians 3:3; Ephesians 2:6; Psalm 34:18; Psalm 40:1; Acts 4:12; James 1:6; Heb 11:6; Psalm 73:25-26; Isaiah 26:9; John 15:15; John 10:37; Mark 2:10)

'It is the humble man that talks too much.'
(*'The Man Who Was Thursday'*, GK Chesterton,
1908)

My pastor often says, *'God is not fair or consistent!'* And this is good news! Jesus admonished us to protect children, and to become like them, if we were to really experience God's Kingdom. (Matthew 18:3,10; Mark 9:42; Mark 10:14-15) Children come to their parents and simply ask for what it is they really want. And people throughout Scripture – all throughout the Psalms in prayer and many historical accounts – come and ask God for what it is they really want. And God honors this! He even gives preference to this innocence, this faith, this relationship.

How about this verse for preference – ***'Though a thousand fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, it will not come near you.'*** (Psalm 91:7) Martha asked for more, and Jesus gave her more revelation than he gave Peter and John. (John 20:11-18) The Canaanite woman asked for more, and for what was not hers, and Jesus was moved and gave it. (Matthew 15:21-28) Jesus tells us to 'nag' (Luke 18:1-8), and also uses a direct parent-child analogy to get us to see, know, trust the Father's heart towards us. (Matthew 7:9)

There is something deeply humble about moving close to God for just yourself – just your needs, your wants, your person. Here today, move close, and block out all others, because in doing this you also block out all your doubts about what God might or might not do for you.

It is our sense of 'fair and consistent' (which really is fear and pride), that keeps us from moving past the thousand, past the ten thousand, and expecting God to move for just us. Be like that child today, and honor God with your faith. Ask him today for what you really, really want, really feel you need now in life. Ask him, believing that he hears you.

(Hebrews 11:6; James 1:6; Luke 19:20-24)

#3

'Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan...' (2 Kings 5:10)

How annoying! And it did annoy the commander, Naaman. Elijah did not even come out to meet him, and this was insulting. Prophets were full-on, pretty rude people at times. (2 Kings 3:13-14)

And why wash *seven* times? God really values our 'path of faith', and to carve out this path – a path that goes against the values, spirit and structures of this world – we often need to beat the trail hard, up and down, back and forth. For faith to become real in our lives, to really see God and hear God in our daily, mortal lives, we need to **'strive'** (Hebrews 4:11), **'press on'** (Philippians 3:12-14), **'hold'**. (1 Timothy 6:12; John 8:31-32)

Sometimes God is going to give us a place, space and time period to 'persist in faith', so that it breaks into our reality. For this reason we are called to persist in prayer for what we need (Luke 18:1-7), not only to receive what we pray for, but, when all is said and done, to be 'found in faith.' (vs 8)

Walking is experiencing. I find this in my gifting, also. We know our full anointing in our God-given gifts, not before or after we are using them, but right in the middle of using them. I think of Samson pushing the pillars and killing three thousand men. Samson did not have his strength on his walk to the pillars, and we know it was no more after pushing these pillars. It was when Samson took his stand in faith that God confirmed Samson's true gifting, call and 'name'.
On a personal note, I always question the 'floor'

or 'footing' of my own gifting in evangelism - except when I am evangelizing. I no longer doubt my gifting, because I have seen it confirmed and affirmed over and over; but I still have never found a rational or spiritual 'justification' for my gifting. It is a gift, given by a Giver. It is in me. In using it, I see it like others see it, and I hope and pray always that it is to the glory of God.

Stand and see. Don't wait to see, before you stand. God's way is in the walking. His way is through faith.

(2 Corinthians 5:7; Luke 21:14-15; Judges 16; Philemon 1:6; Hebrews 11:6)

'Your servants will do what the Lord has said.'

(Numbers 32:31)

After 40 years of wandering in the desert (because of doubt and grumbling), and on the brink of crossing the Jordan into the 'promised land', a group of people come to Moses and ask if they can 'have their inheritance' on the East side of the Jordan river. Moses lets loose. He calls them a **'brood of sinners'**, and says they are **'standing in the place of their fathers and making the Lord even more angry with Israel.'** (vs 14)

Two things are interesting to me here: Moses, so close to God (Exodus 33:11), appears to misjudge these people. He hears their request and feels that they are angering God 'more' than their forefathers. This is not the case. It is actually OK with God. (see vs 31, also confirmed in Joshua 22) In Joshua 22 we see that Joshua and the priests also misjudge these same people, mistaking their good faith and efforts in building a tabernacle model, as blasphemy, idolatry. If Moses, Joshua and the priests misjudged people who were right with God, how much more might I misjudge people who are right with God!

Secondly: God moved. God *did* give them this good land. He gave them their prize *before* the fight. He called it early. He gave them an early inheritance.

Is there something you see up ahead, and you long for it now? There is precedent here to press into God and ask for an 'early delivery'. There is a time and place when God does this. He often did

it in scripture. People leaned in, and God acted. I think of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28), the Centurion (Luke 7:1-10), and Rahab (Joshua 2:12-14).

Jesus himself instructed us to trust him, and come persistently to him for our needs. (Luke 18:1-8; Hebrews 4:16) Many of these people were not even 'God's people', did not have the prophecies or the right theologies, but they saw God in Christ, and moved in faith towards him, asked him, and he gave.

‘Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?’ (Luke 17:17-18)

Jesus healed ten lepers, and one came back to ‘give praise’. We are told by Jesus that God makes the sun rise on the righteous and the unrighteous, and the rain to fall on the good and the evil. (Matthew 5:45) So, what is really happening when we come to the Lord and thank him for the rain, for the sun, for our healing? What sets us apart from all the others who also received the healing, the rain and sun?

Well, it is not all about what we receive, how we prosper, or even who we are. God might raise up two kings (Daniel 2:21-22), and only one lifts his eyes to the Lord and recognizes God for this. Both are what they are because of the Lord, but one ‘gives praise’ to God for what he is. Does he receive more? No. He simply is seeing the truth about what he is, how he is.

This matters on two levels. It matters to God: Jesus asked pointedly where the other lepers were, and he also noted that it was the foreigner here that was ‘on point’ in the deep matter of seeing, praising, connecting with God. Secondly, God will judge, if not now, later. We are told that Herod ***‘fell down and died’*** (Acts 12:23) because ***‘he failed to give glory to God.’*** God had enough, and acted. We are also told that Pilate had and held his authority because it had been given him by God. (John 19:11) What Pilate did with this authority would be on Pilate.

If God gives you position and resource, do not fall into the mistake of thinking he gives you the temptation to misuse these positions and resources. It is on you to seek God and 'give praise' to him for what you have, and live accordingly.

'When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.' (James 1:13)

'I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, Lord, as you know. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help. I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the great assembly.'
(Psalm 40:9-10)

There is much about speaking out in scripture, but I love these two verses in a particular way.

Growing up, 'son of a preacher man', I lived a childhood that was based on speaking out the gospel. I witnessed the preaching of the word as a discipline, a principle and also a joy.

As I have grown up, and grown in my own faith and convictions, I have often struggled with the 'duty' to speak out, the 'obligation', the challenge, the sacrifice... Can you relate to this pressure?

We are admonished to speak out (1 Corinthians 9:16), to count the cost (Luke 14:28; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:57-62), to not give up (Galatians 6:9), to 'strive' (Hebrews 4:11), etc. However, there is another side to this story, this fight, this journey. There is a 'warrior' way of doing things, that comes not from duty but from delight, zeal, fire, freedom.

There is a level, a sphere, a dimension, where we ***'keep in step with the spirit'*** (Galatians 5:25), speak from joy and with pride and power, and in this are ***'kept in perfect peace.'*** (Isaiah 26:3). This does not mean you always speak out, but like Jesus, only when the Father acts and leads. (John 5:19) This is a space of courage, where God's word is a ***'fire in your bones'*** (Jeremiah

20:9), and you delight to speak out, you only hold back by the power of Jesus, rather than speak out under pressure.

'The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, 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)

#7

‘... whether they listen or fail to listen... they will know that a prophet has been among them.’ (Ezekiel 2:5)

So Elijah was being told by God that he would not be listened to, but they would know he was a prophet. This is extraordinary on a number of levels. First, God called this man into something that was going to be hard and rejected from start to finish. Period. That is a hard word to receive. Ponder this for a moment.

Elijah’s legacy and words and works would impact millions throughout the ages, like a shooting star that never stops. But Elijah’s personal experience would not be that of a ‘star’; his experience would resemble – and foreshadow – the sorrows of Christ.

Not only would Elijah be rejected by men, but this rejection would be because people thought him true, not false. They would reject him, knowing he was a prophet: ***‘... they will know that a prophet has been among them.’***

Jesus’ most tyrannical enemy is from him who knows him to be true: the devil.

Most of Christ’s resistance was not from disbelief, but from belief and jealousy – those, like Nietzsche¹, who could not accept a deity if they could not *be* the deity. (Genesis 3:5-6; Acts 5:17)

¹ *‘If there were gods, how could I endure not to be a god? Therefore, there are no gods!’* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra, F.Nietzsche, 1883)

Most of your resistance in this life, if you are called and privileged (and to be rewarded) as Elijah and Christ, will be by that spirit and those people who resisted Elijah and Christ.

‘Blessed are you when people insult you... for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.’ (Matthew 5:11-12)

‘A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.’ (John 15:20-21)

'So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.' (2 Corinthians 5:16)

When things obscure, my brother, my sister, this is our moment to smile and say we will walk this road, this faith road.

In this our weakness, He is strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9) Don't miss this moment. Pushing forward in faith, where our vision fails and falters, here the floor of this life will fold back and you will walk on water. (2 Corinthians 5:7; 2 Corinthians 4:18)

In many respects, it is this clouded vision of God's glory, that is *our* glory moment, to call on Him again, to push forward, to lean in, as did Moses. (Exodus 33:18) This is the place, the moment, to submit our own doubting hearts to the road of faith. (1 John 3:20; Jeremiah 17:9) This place of confusion and seeing God as completely an impossible reality, is the glory moment of faith, its highest place of virtue, to defy all that was stolen through knowledge, and vindicate the cross before the eyes of heavenly bodies. Don't doubt. Don't 'sink' here, as did Peter. (*Matthew 14:22-33; Ephesians 3:10; II Corinthians 2:15; Genesis 3:5-6*)

When we cannot see, we seek. When we *can* see, we gaze. (Psalm 27:4)

Jesus, we do ask you this day, to increase our faith. Jesus, do show us your glory, and let us hold that treasure now and forevermore. Let us contend for that faith, strive for that rest, press on

towards that goal. Jesus, we know, we believe, we move in the direction of God through faith, through the door of Jesus Christ. Amen and amen.

(Matthew 13:44; 1 Timothy 6:12; Hebrews 4:11; Philippians 3:12-14; John 10:9)

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

'... your kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven...' (Matthew 6:9-13)

Jesus taught us to pray and ask for heaven to connect to earth, to be in and through earth. Now.

Is your earth connected to your heaven? Do you straddle both spheres right now?

Paul writes that our lives are **'hidden with Christ in God'** (Col 3:3), and that even now we are **'seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.'** (Ephesians 2:6) Jesus claimed to know his Father and hear his voice. (John 5:19; John 8:55) People said he was **'raving mad and demon-possessed.'** (John 10:20) But Jesus tells you and me that we know his voice! (John 10:27)

Do you hear his voice? You do. There is no doubt. The only question is whether you stand in that space, make it your own, live in it, and do not deny it.

In James we are told that we can ask for wisdom, and we will be given it, but we are admonished in our asking to not doubt. (James 1:13) Peter doubted when in arm's reach of Christ, and Christ *did* ask him, **'Why did you doubt?'** (Matthew 14:22-33) It does matter.

The faith life – seeing what we do not see with our earthly eyes, hearing what we do not hear with our earthly ears, and dealing with people not from a **'worldly perspective'** (2 Corinthians 5:16) – this is the life Christ calls us to. Some will think you are 'raving mad', and maybe even a little 'demon-possessed'. Dare to step in a little closer

to the Lord, and acknowledge his reality over what others might see or validate.

Love your neighbor, but walk with the spirit. How else will you introduce the spirit to your neighbor? Jesus is your friend (John 15:15), don't leave him out of your other friend groups. Call on God to bring your heavenly reality to your earthly life, his kingdom come on earth.

(2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Job 19:25-27; Psalm 63:3)

#10

'Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith.'

(Mark 6:6)

I am never amazed at lack of faith. Are you? Here in Mark we read that Jesus was amazed at their (his own family's) lacking faith.

I expect people not to see, not to believe. I'm amazed at Jesus' amazement. If he was amazed, it is as if he expects faith to come to and through us. It should happen. The fact that it does not, in Jesus' eyes, is a thing of wonder.

I don't know exactly how to understand this 'amazement' of Jesus, other than something strong, pure and childlike at work. No anger here, no reaction, just honest amazement that his own deity is not seen and believed. One thing is clear: it is a man of great faith that sees so clearly, so deeply, that he is amazed at others' lacking faith.

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

There is another way to 'amaze' Jesus, and that is *with* great faith. (Luke 7:9) This is also hard to fathom, but real. Amaze Jesus today with great faith! Listen to his voice (John 10:27), seek him sincerely (Jeremiah 29:13), keep in step with the spirit (Galatians 5:25), and take faith steps today.

#11 Happy and Don't Know It!

I remember one day I was really stressed about some financial needs, and could see no way out. I parked the car and sat for a moment. Everything in my mind and heart was pushing worry and planning to the fore... I stopped for a moment, and decided that I would do what I am called to do: give thanks in all situations. (Colossians 3:17; I Thessalonians 5:16-18) This was very, very hard. It felt like I was turning a raft around in white waters and trying to paddle upriver.

I started with, well, my moment. I had this moment to sit still. Thank you, Lord, for this moment of quietness. I had food on the table at home, and a roof overhead, for me and the family. I had this provision, at least for today, so thank you, Lord, for my 'daily bread'. I had my health. Thank you. I had my faith and values in place at this time, that have not always been 'in place'. Thank you, Lord, for this place where my soul stands at this time. I had past experiences where this kind of worry was allayed, where needs were met, where the impossible was resolved. Thank you, Lord, for your faithfulness in the past.

This past experience of God's faithfulness, broke into my moment in the car. I realized that I have, in Christ, hope for now, for this new, difficult situation. I have hope. Thank you, Jesus, for hope. In you, Lord, it is a **'living hope.'** (Romans 5:5) You, Lord, can and do **'turn my darkness into light.'** (2 Samuel 22:29) The impossible is possible for you. (Matt 19:26) Jesus, thank you.

'Do not worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,

***and the peace of God which passes all
understanding will guard your hearts and your
minds in Christ Jesus.'***
(Phillipians 4:6-7)

#12 Strongholds

A friend of mine lost his brother to suicide. A few years later he told me that he was scared to let go of the pain, in case with the pain he also lost some memory of his brother. This is deep, and understandable. Lady A sings, *'I'd rather hurt than feel nothing at all'*, and this is a motif through much music, movies, poetry and literature.

God says that he can give us a **'new spirit and new heart.'** (Ezekiel 36:26) Sometimes when I wrestle with a stressful area in my heart or mind – like fear, insecurity or pride – I consider God's offer to 'transform' or 'make new'. I find that I pause here. I don't quickly take the offer.

Two things I have come to identify are at play in this moment of my hesitation: First, I *do* want the pain of the struggle and the stress gone, but I want to find the way to overcome it myself. In other words, I want to be stronger, and be the 'god' in this battle. So, my pride is at work. Secondly, I *do* want the pain of the struggle gone, but I want to *understand* and control its 'gone-ness'. Because if I don't, how can I ensure that it will stay gone? So, fear of its return is at work.

In both areas above, it is clear to me that 'faith' lacks. **'Without faith it is impossible to please God.'** (Hebrews 11:6) God has set up the 'overcoming' of strongholds in our lives, to be a conquering by Christ, and not by ourselves. We certainly partner in the process, and are called to the 'step of faith', but it is Christ that battles and his blood that is the power.

'They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...'

(Revelation 12:11)

'For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.' (Corinthians 10:3-5)

#13 LOOKING FOR PERFECTION

It is OK to seek perfection. In fact, I would say it is unnatural - or even a type of despair or rebellion - to *not* seek perfection. Scripture tells us that God has **'set eternity in the hearts of men'** (Ecclesiastes 3:11), and our very image is that of an eternal and perfect God. (Genesis 1:27) To seek perfection is to seek home: heaven.

Perfection, however, is not perfectionism. Like anything good, to make it an end in itself is not good. The good thing becomes an idol, a competing deity for your soul. To have a clean house can be a good value, stewarding a God-given resource, or it can be an obsession, intrinsically connected to and controlling your sense of self and spiritual wellbeing. Perfection – or 'heaven' – is not what you make it or want it to be; it is God's residence, Spirit, and domain. To seek true perfection, is to seek God. Do you seek God?

Now here is the good news about those of you who do seek true perfection, true peace in God, and yet are weary worn: All men of God throughout Scripture yearned, ached and failed in their 'true' and 'right' walk with God. It was never easy, the journey back, the journey to perfection.

In the Old Testament, and even in Christ, there was and is a **'striving to enter that rest.'** (Hebrews 4:11) Elijah dropped to his knees (1 Kings 19:4), Moses needed refreshing (Exodus 33:18), Jacob wrestled all night (Genesis 32), John doubted Christ (Matthew 11:1-11), Paul had to 'strain ahead' (Philippians 3:12-14), David had to cry out for safety, rescue, even 'joy'. (Psalm 86:4) To stand in truth, and journey towards truth,

will always have a 'thorn' in its side and bloodstains of a crucifixion. (Mark 8:34-38; 2 Corinthians 12:9).

'We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal bodies.' (2 Corinthians 4:10)

THIS FAR, AND SOMETIMES FURTHER:
Walking by the Spirit

The 'sometimes' is a tough thing about our walk with God. We live in a hard and scary life, and we seek to make things secure. This is natural. We long for peace, and this is often associated in our minds and experiences with walls, doors and locks.

Our relationship with God does not conform to this system. We cannot 'get' God, and then do things the same thereafter, or understand things the same thereafter. He is not an equation or set of rules. **'God is spirit'**, and here's a challenging and yet very exciting truth: **'He seeks worshippers to worship in Spirit and truth.'** (John 4:24)

All real relationship is modeled on God and the dynamics of our relationship with him. So let's take a look into some dynamics of our relationship with God, and over time let's allow this truth, and his Spirit, to inform our relationships with family, friends, neighbors and enemies.

In Scripture we see powerful insights to God, and just how deep he looks into the heart of mankind. (1 Samuel 16:7) He sees deeper than we see into ourselves. Our hearts can and do instruct us (Psalm 16:7), but they can also deceive and condemn us. (1 John 3:20; Jeremiah 17:9) For this reason, our ultimate confidence is not that we know God (because our own knowing is flawed), but that God knows us. (2 Timothy 2:19) Here are a few scriptures to ponder:

Rahab: She was a prostitute, and in the enemy camp. She hid God's spies, and lied about it. God spared her life, and she is honored in and through Scripture. (Joshua 6:25) Does God condone lying? No! But here we have 'precedence' of God's deep mercies and that we need to be careful how we judge.

Cornelius was a Roman Centurion, and yet God says to him that his prayers and gifts to the poor were acceptable to God, and for this God blesses him and brings him revelation of the gospel. (Acts 10:4) Jesus himself cautioned us that in trying to judge 'sons of the kingdom' from 'sons of the wicked one', we would be in danger of getting it wrong. This will be taken care of by the angels at the end of time. (Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-42 – special attention to vs.29)

Jesus responded to every situation and every individual very uniquely. He did not have just one phrase or Scripture, but he did have one key message – real relationship with God through Jesus.

How could Jesus discern and respond and lead each person differently? He would keep his eyes and heart on the Father, and **'do only what the Father did and said.'** (John 5:19) This is how we, too, must 'relate' to God – i.e. through his Spirit and his voice (John 10:27; Galatians 5:25) – and this is how we will know when our limits may not be God's limits. He has more freedom for us, and through us for others, than sometimes we are comfortable with. He may, for example, want you to eat with a tax collector, or allow a prostitute to touch and thank you. (cf. Luke 19:1-10; Luke 7:36-50)

#15 MARTYR COMPLEX

There is so much pain in life – just in our personal lives and inner circles.

We also have the pain of the world, flooding to and through our minds and homes through the news and social media. With so much need and inequity just down the street, and abuse across the globe, how can we find peace and capacity to enjoy even a quiet place, a safe moment, a comforting, hot beverage? There is always someone else in arm's reach who needs it more...

We carry guilt. We do. Something in us knows guilt cannot rule, but cannot – should not - either be dispelled completely. We need our peace and provision, but we also need our souls to be intact, to feel for others.

Two insights for us from the life and teaching of Jesus Christ:

Jesus was a ***'man of sorrows'*** (Isaiah 53:4), but he was also a man of great peace. He 'stayed his mind on the Lord' (Isaiah 26:3) and kept in step with the Father. (John 5:19; Galatians 5:25) One moment that impacts me – liberates me – was when Jesus was overcome with 'compassion' for the needs of people around him, seeing and feeling that they were ***'helpless and harassed, like sheep without a shepherd.'*** (Matthew 9:36) In this moment of intense emotion Jesus turns to his disciples and rather than admonishing them to action, he directs their attention to the Father. He says, ***'Pray, therefore, to the Lord of the harvest, to send out workers.'*** This primary upward focus is essential, and always the

calibrator of our lateral focus.

Remember, Jesus told us the most important commandment was to love God, and secondly to love others. Our love for self and others will come to and through us – with perfect peace – as we hold God as our first love and focus. (Matthew 22:36-40)

Secondly, God lives in perfect peace even with disparities in this life, and complete disparity in the afterlife - Heaven/Hell. This is not sanction for 'denial' or turning a blind eye to the pains and needs of our generation, but it does tell us that there is a place of spiritual peace that runs deep, is eternal, is available to us now, and is beyond our 'understanding'. (Philippians 4:6-7) Do you want this peace? Do you want to be able to know peace, even in a storm, or amidst poverty and brokenness?

This is where we need God, through Jesus, to open a road before us, and begin to pour into us, work into us (cf. Mark 8:22-26), a **'new heart and new spirit.'** (Ezekiel 36:26) This is a road with increasing light and increasing experience of freedom. (cf. Proverbs 4:18)

This is a process, and God's way. He calls us to believe and walk and seek and sacrifice and **'strive to enter that rest.'** (Hebrews 4:11; Philippians 3:12-14) Note: the goal of this striving is 'rest'. It is not a good-works road, but a faith-work road. It is real, and completely rewarding. God, through his word, will often give the identity, the name, at the end of actually living out that 'name'. (Revelation 2:17)

Onward, soldier of redemption, and keep your eyes on the prize! (cf. Hebrews 12:2)

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

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

'He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...' (Jesus, Luke 4:18/Isaiah 61:1)

'Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.'

(2 Timothy 4:14-15)

I have always been troubled by the insecurity that Paul experienced in Ephesus. Apparently there was a local that managed to cause him and the other believers such opposition – a man named Alexander - that Paul warns the believers to be *'on guard against him.'*

This is a little unnerving. It is a particular 'time' and requirement for these believers. It is a call to be shrewd, to think, to watch. It is not a call to 'forgive' or 'forebear' or walk away; it is a call to turn, to face, to act wisely.

Two things really challenge me in this type of 'season'. Firstly, I am challenged to be *'shrewd as a serpent'* without becoming a serpent. Bono once prayed that we would not become a monster in order to defeat a monster.¹ Jesus *did* call his disciples to be ***'shrewd as serpents'***, but in a spirit that was ***'innocent as a dove.'*** (Matthew 10:16)

How can one be shrewd and innocent? This is only possible in and through the spirit of Jesus. Galatians 5:25 says that if we ***'live by the spirit'***, we are to ***'keep in step with the spirit.'***

¹ *'Miss Sarajevo'*, U2, live from Milan, Italy, 1995

Secondly, I am challenged when I reflect on the fact that to walk as Jesus – as Paul did and as I am called to do – you will have ‘Alexanders’ cross your path, the same way Jesus had Judas at his side up till the bitter end! In fact, Jesus left Judas in charge of the money, and let him give him a kiss of betrayal, kiss of death. However, through that darkest of betrayals and darkest hour of history, the brightest light now shines – the evidence and power of resurrection to eternal life, now and forevermore.

So to ***‘keep in step with the spirit’*** is not necessarily to oust every ‘Alexander’ or ‘Judas’ that is in the mix. Our call is to be pure, innocent, aware, but only do and say what we see and hear the Father doing. (cf. John 5:19)

But, yes, there is a time to be on guard and avoid, resist the evil man!

(Psalm 82:4; 2 Thessalonians 3:2-3; 2 Tim 4:18; Psalm 94:16)

#17

How will you justify your heavenly experience in heaven? The same way you justify heaven on earth. Jesus taught us to pray, **'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!'** (Matthew 6:9-13)

In Psalm 26 David cries out for vindication and speaks to his own innocence. But David did not believe he was without sin, this was not his confidence. His call for vindication and pronouncement of his own good deeds, were more of a statement of his preferred life values, the 'kingdom' and the person he valued and longed to be, to live, to celebrate, to experience. We know this because in the same prayers he speaks of his own sin. (Psalm 24:16-22; Psalm 25:7)

There is never a 'good' thing or experience or even moment of peace that we can 'justify' by our own walk, words or deeds. The justification is so much higher and wider and deeper and longer. It is from the breath and blood of Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 3:16-20) We were made in God's image (Genesis 1:27), and were made for heaven. We were fashioned and formed to carry only paradise in our souls.

A very long - but simple - story, short: God stepped down into the darkness we chose (Philippians 2:6-7), and actually became that darkness (2 Corinthians 5:21), and then took the darkness out with himself. So death died, and with it the 'sting of death' was removed. (1 Corinthians 15:54-58; Isaiah 25:8).

Here in the darkness, in the mire and the blood,

God's own blood speaks a better word than the blood of murder that brought us here. (Hebrews 12:24) We have come back into focus. Our Fall was broken, hit the Rock that was Christ. So although our actions still speak, and even condemn us (1 John 3:20), and the devil speaks and accuses us (Revelation 12:10), Jesus stands in his own blood, and by this blood he frees us. He speaks a new name over us (2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 2:17), and removes every sin from our past.

The present is redefined, and the future is ever brighter. (Proverbs 4:18)

'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated...'

(Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:13)

This verse is very important, because you - and everyone - is a Jacob. We need to really hear what God is saying in what God is saying, or we can pick up the wrong point.

For example, Jesus healed on the Sabbath day and we called him a lawbreaker. Did he heal on the Sabbath day, and in some sense was it the breaking of a law? Yes! (*The same way he overruled the stoning of the woman by breaking - or fulfilling and overwriting - the law, Luke 7:36-50*).

Jesus will often speak the *truer* truth in the midst of words and circumstances that can distract. He even told his disciples that this was the purpose of parables: that those with eyes to really see the truth, would see through the parable, and others would miss the point. (Luke 8:10)

God loves everyone more than we can fathom. Pure love, beginning to end. **'God wills that none should perish...'** (2 Peter 3:9) The whole earth and **'all that live in it'** are the Lord's. (Psalm 24:1) God says, **'All souls are mine!'** (Ezekiel 18:4) The heart and cry of God from Genesis to Revelation is a story of seeking and saving the lost - even abandoning the 'saved' to go in search of the lost. (Luke 15; Luke 19:10)

So we question and query why *any* are lost, if God is so loving. Yes, the mysteries and dark recesses and spheres of God's justice are to be feared, and avoided. Judgment is sacred ground,

and is God's alone. (Romans 11:33-36; Isaiah 55:9). What we need to hold and see everything else through - is the cross of Jesus Christ, and God's Word that says He loves.

So what do we understand by '*Jacob I loved...*'? Well, when God loves and sets apart and saves, that is the final, irrevocable report. That is the point of this passage. It is not about hate or rejecting anyone, it is about God loving everyone. God's love for you supersedes your own heart's condemnation (1 John 3:20), it supersedes the devil's accusations (Revelation 12:10-11), it supersedes your own sense of being right or wrong (1 Corinthians 4:3- 4), it *precedes* your first breath (Psalm 139:16), and overwrites your wrongs. (Isaiah 1:18; Zechariah 3:1-5; Isaiah 6:6)

When God 'loves' and 'saves', as He did Jacob and as He does you, this report is the final one. We note the 'report' here, but we also note the 'Reporter'. God also continues to 'whisper' to you (Ezekiel 36:26), to make his thoughts known to you (Jeremiah 29:13; Amos 4:13), and what He speaks is the truth. Listen to him. He will set you free from other reporters and their reports. (John 8:36; 2 Corinthians 3:17)

'When he 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 into his harvest field.' (Matthew 9:36-38)

Three things stand out to me about this moment, and these words of Christ. First, he was moved with feeling for the people around him. Am I moved with 'compassion' for the spiritual place of people?

Secondly, when Jesus saw the need, and even the opportunity of reaching people (the 'plentiful harvest'), he did not panic and rush to 'gather'. Instead, he shared this reality, this vision with his disciples, and called them to first go to the Father and pray: ***'Ask the Lord, therefore, to send out workers.'*** Do I think and stress and 'guilt' about the vast need in the world, or do I first go to the Father in prayer, and ask him to raise up workers?

Thirdly, Jesus does indicate that the harvest will be harvested by people – by you and me, maybe, if we're lucky! Jesus did admonish us to ask the Father to send out workers (i.e. to rest, and pray for this need), but he does indicate that the Father's response to this prayer, to this harvest, will be to send out workers, *people*, maybe you and me? Are you ready to be sent?

'My Kingdom is not of this world.' (John 18:36)

At a young age, not sure when, a dark sense set in... feeling like all things 'Christian' – and of the Christian community – did not really have currency or value in this world. So I would seek currency in this world, on this world's terms, and then graft in Christianity. My footing, so to speak, was worldly, my message, Jesus.

To seek relevance in the world is not, in itself, of the Spirit of God. This should be a discipline, indeed, but not a preference and a hiding place. Our hiding place is God. (Psalm 32:7) Our 'real' existence is in heaven even now (Colossians 3:3), and our 'stay' here is the *less* real, the one that needs to bend and even break to 'please' the terms of our true homeland. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Paul did seek to do what was ***'right in the sight of people'*** (2 Corinthians 8:21), but only as a means to fade – not fit in – and create more latitude for people to really hear the gospel. This is seeking to be relevant and/or culturally sensitive, because of a sold-out commitment to the offense of the gospel. This is different to my own hankerings as a young person, and even young believer.

There is no 'right' or 'wrong' (as far as man can determine) when it comes to being a relevant believer in our culture. It all depends on the man's heart for God, and relationship with Jesus. If we love God above all else, as we are commanded to do by Jesus, and if we expend the best of our strength on loving and pursuing God (Matthew

22:36-30; Jeremiah 26:9), we will find ourselves at times powerfully relevant in our culture, Spirit-led and wisdom-leading; and at other times, we will find ourselves completely irrelevant, possibly offensive, even to our family of believers.

One cannot be committed to fitting into one's society any more than one can be committed to fitting into one's church. Our commitment is to God, and our call is to love one another from that spirit, with the goal of pleasing God, not man. (Luke 12:4-5, 8-9; Galatians 1:10)

'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)

This parable has impacted me on so many levels, not least because it is fully contained in one verse! And in that one verse it is suspenseful, emotive, conclusive.

Amazing, really!

However, regarding the actual story and content of this verse, let me share the following. First, note the urgency. Jesus is pointing us to an aspect of seeing and holding the kingdom of God, as a type of scrambling, a shrewd dealing, the securing of precious cargo. Does the kingdom of God feel like this to you? Is there something really, really valuable about it, something that glints in the light of sun like treasure, that you scramble and strive to keep in your vision?

We are constantly told in Scripture and by Christ to be at peace, even during dangerous, life-threatening circumstances, but we are called to *'strive'* for one thing: to enter his rest. (Hebrews 4:11) The kingdom of God is about God, and that is astounding, eternal, so bright a light that its reflection off the face of Moses blinded people. (Exodus 34:29) Have you glimpsed the truth of Jesus 'off the page', so to speak, such that you scramble to hold that light in your vision?

Jesus also told us that believing on him, we would experience ***'streams of living water flowing from within us.'*** (John 7:37-38). Perhaps there is more of ***'Christ in you'***

(Colossians 1:27), that you want to experience today. Ask Jesus – the 'living word' – to come off the page in your heart, soul and vision today.

'Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.' (John 14:12)

Jesus came to serve, not to be served. (Matthew 20:28) This is an astounding truth. The King of kings fades into you and me. His glory, so to speak, is to not receive glory, but to disappear into us. We are told in Colossians that God's mystery is revealed in this - not Christ, but ***'Christ in you.'*** (Colossians 1:27) Christ in you is an end objective of God, but it is also the beginning of the rest of eternity.

We are told that we will be with Christ, and him with us, and his Spirit will ***'remind us of things he taught'***, and also ***'teach us all things.'*** (John 14:26) But we are also told these key truths about Christ in us: ***'streams of living water will flow from within us.'*** (John 7:38) Do you feel new streams of God – not coming *over* you, but birthing in and coming *out* of you?

Secondly, we are told that we would do ***'even greater things'*** than Christ did. (John 14:12) Do you do greater things than Christ did? I personally cannot put my finger on these things in my own life. But this I do see, and feel and understand from this: In Christ there is a power that is not 'chapter and verse', and there is and will be realities and voices and impartations and insights and authority spoken – all of which comes from his Spirit in you, and is only 'written' by and through you.

Jesus was the word made flesh (John 1:14), and

in a very thrilling sense, you are Christ made flesh, here and now.

Know his voice (John 10:27), and let him live through you (Galatians 2:20), and flow to and out through you. This is the truest you!

#23

‘Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’ (John 21:22)

These words of Jesus to Peter make one thing stand out strong: Jesus has a unique path for each of us.

You may be standing shoulder to shoulder with another, even your brother, but there is a part of you completely, even eternally separate. This is important to know and hold. First and foremost, you have been breathed forth by God, for God, and on a path with God. Relationship with yourself (this is deep) and with others, is second to your identity from God, and your relationship with God.

First I want to reinforce this, and then simply end with an insight on why this is exciting!

The ‘reinforcer’: When Jesus was asked what the most important command was, he quoted from Deuteronomy and said, ***‘To love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.’*** (Matthew 22:36-40; Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

That is an all-consuming focus and direction. All your heart. All your soul. All... Where does this leave other people? Well, right there beside you. God is not trying to debunk your love and commitment to others. He is trying to free you from a love of self, and stuff. After you pour out your love and energy on God, then Jesus points immediately to others, saying the second most important command is like the first: ***‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*** (Again, Jesus is quoting

from Leviticus 19:18¹).

Why is it exciting that Jesus has a unique path and identity for you? Because in this you soar! There are no bounds where no man – not even you – can define who it is you are. There is a God that loves you, and can re-name you, and cut new paths for you. No sin brands you forever, no father, no ego, no mistake, no fortune, no misfortune. Opportunities for life, spirit, past, present and future are endless here.

Know God's voice. Draw near to Jesus and listen today. (*Revelation 2:17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Corinthians 4:3-4*)

¹ Jesus often quoted Scripture. He knew Scripture, and leaned on it even to resist the devil (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 20:17-18; John 10:34; John 8:58/Exodus 3:14, etc.)

READING AND MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE

It's the reality that is in and through Christ, that is the Christian's truest reality. That is why we **'take captive thoughts and make them subject to Christ.'** (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). This is also why there is a split reality in our existence here – we have our feet here in a mortal world, amongst people who do not see what we see, even when we are with them, speaking with them, using the same words. Our eyes are on Christ and what is most true to us, is what we perceive in and through Christ.

This is not the case for someone who is *not* in Christ. Our feet are planted here – and this is the will of Christ (John 17:15) – but we are also **'hidden with Christ in God'** (Colossians 3:3), dead here (Galatians 2:20), seated elsewhere. (Ephesians 2:6)

When we come to know Christ, this world on earth becomes a type of 'planet' in a new universe for us. This world is not our 'world' anymore, it is now part of our life story and journey.

The Bible is God's script for us, so that we can know him, and get **'off the page'** into his Spirit. Jesus said his words would never pass away, but he also told us that his words were **'spirit and life.'** (Psalm 63:3) The written Word, my brothers and sisters, will pass away; the **'spirit and life'** Word, will not. This is why it is so important to know the Word, and let it be 'true' – i.e. spirit and life – in you.

Now, note this: God spreads out his own revelation about himself in 66 books over thousands of years and thousands of stories. Why? So we do not get stuck on any *one* book, or any *one* story! As we read *ALL* of the Bible, over and over again because it is living, we lift off the page to spirit where words and arguments are not enough.

This accounts for Paul's doxology in the middle of Romans. (Romans 11:33-36) If you stop on any one book or story, you will miss the mystery and the depth of God's full revelation – like the 'Trinity' for example. If you slow down and pause too long on any one book or story, you veer off into philosophy, rather than true knowledge of God. The spread – and paradoxes and even contradicting accounts – are to get us past the limits of our reason to the expanses and winds of revelation.

Reading the Bible is for knowing God, and for making him known. The Bible can be misused and an idol in itself that keeps people from God. (Matthew 4:1-11; John 5:39-40) Reading the Bible can become another pressure in your Christian life, something the enemy will use to 'guilt' you. The written Word is so that we come to know, love and walk with the Living Word, the '**word made flesh.**' (John 1:14)

Most believers throughout history, and even now, that have honored God with faith, suffering and sacrifice, do not even own a Bible, know very little of it, and could not even read it if they had one. So do not let Bible reading become something in your heart and mind that it is not! This holds true for Scripture memory also. I speak to Scripture memory below, but want to make something clear

here at the outset.

People will also take on learning verses from 'duty' (not always a bad thing), but it can become a pressure that is not of the Lord. I personally have come to associate memorizing of Scripture with my call to reach the lost. Every verse I learn allows me to meditate on knowing God better personally, and it also equips me for reaching others. I personally memorize with the motivation of my gift and mission; in this sense there is little sacrifice or virtue in this 'discipline' for me. But this is not the case or call for everyone. Do not let Scripture memory become a pressure in itself, something the devil taints with 'burden' (or pride) that is not Spirit-led in your life.

(Scripture Memory)

When I was 7 years old, I was out walking with my parents in the open fields of Montevideo, Uruguay. We lived on a ship at the time, and it was in dry dock in Argentina, 1982. My parents were taking a 'prayer walk' together, or time of praying and talking about the Lord.

My mom turned to me and said that she and my dad were trying to memorize Psalm 8, and asked if I wanted to go walking on my own for thirty minutes and we would come back and see who could recite the whole Psalm. So off we went in different directions across the hills. Thirty minutes later we came back, and I was the only one who could recite it word-perfect, and I still can recite it to this day. Every time I look at the stars, I think and whisper Psalm 8. It is for this reason – the ability to learn and retain truths about God - that the Lord instructs us to teach our children about him, often and with intention. (Deuteronomy 6:6-

7)

Jesus knew Scripture, even quite obscure Scripture (e.g. Psalm 82:6, quoted in John 10:34), and leaned on it. (see Matthew 4:1-11)

I store up Scripture in my heart and mind to know God better, and to reach people. Jesus said the Spirit would **'recall to our minds what Jesus taught'** (John 14:26), and for this, we need to know what he taught. We are called to meditate on Scripture (Psalm 1, Psalm 119:11, Joshua 1:8), and told that it is a **'sword of the Spirit.'** (Ephesians 6:17) Scripture 'cuts' (Hebrews 4:12), and ultimately is the basis for 'faith in Jesus Christ'. (2 Timothy 3:15)

I now try to 'pair' verses that I learn, as they come across my path. For example, for a long time I thought of '1 John 3:20' when referencing the deceitfulness of the heart, and recently I was reminded of 'Jeremiah 17:9' regarding this same theme. So I 'paired' these 2 verses in my mind and memory work. This helps me bolster my understanding of the issue, and God's heart on the issue, and it helps me 'add' one Scripture on another, or connect my learning.

I sometimes go to sleep reciting reference and verse over and over, in order to commit a new verse to memory. I often try to recite a few verses when I wake up, to inspire me for life, and also to reinforce my mind's discipline in learning Scripture.

I leave you with this very important 'pair' of verses, about Scripture itself. The first warns us to not let the learning of Scripture become an idol in itself, a pride issue; the point of all written word, is

to know the Living Word. The second warns us that we *do* need to know the Scriptures, and to know them together with the power of God:

‘You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.’ (John 5:39-40)

‘Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.’ (Matthew 22:29)

'I pray that you would be active in sharing your faith, that you might come into a full knowledge of what it is you have in Christ.'

(Philemon 1:6)

Three things are very important to have embedded in our hearts and minds when it comes to the issue of witness and sharing Jesus with others.

For All People: First, it is important to remember this truth: Jesus Christ is God's message for the *whole world* – all peoples, nations, cultures, societies, employers, employees, friends, neighbors and families. This 'global' mission and vision is not ours to negotiate. This is clear from start to finish in the Scriptures, and this 'exclusiveness' is why the gospel is offensive.

How this can be, and the many questions that assail us regarding God's justice, suffering, those who have not heard, etc. – we have not been given the wisdom nor the remit to grapple and stall over such matters. We are called to believe that God has got the answers, the justice, the timing and hearts and minds and times and places of all souls. We must simply hear and believe that ***'all authority in heaven and earth'*** has been given to Christ, and he calls us to make disciples of himself. (*Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 11:33-36; Isaiah 55:9*)

People Are Searching For Jesus: Secondly, it is important to know and believe that every man, woman and child was made for this relationship with Jesus Christ. Regardless of how people think and feel and what they 'report', God's report is

that he made them in his image (Genesis 1:27), his own eternity is in their hearts and this eternity calls to know God. (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Psalm 42:7) The peace and joy they seek will only be found in Jesus. We need to believe this, because that gives us heart to lean in towards people, even if they are resisting.

The Gospel Is Revelation: Thirdly, the power of the gospel is not in your delivery, your words, your deeds. The power of the gospel is in the gospel. It is a 'revealed' truth, not one caught or delivered through man's wisdom. (1 Corinthians 1:20-21)

Even when we fear (2 Corinthians 7:5), we must defer this message to mankind. Sometimes it is precisely when we feel weak, that is it most 'Spirit-led' to share Jesus. God not only uses our weakness, but sometimes deliberately weakens us, so that he will come through stronger in the spreading of the gospel. (2 Corinthians 12:9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

Paul was up and down in his feelings, as was John the Baptist (Matthew 11:1-11), as was Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), as was Christ. (Matthew 26:37-39) Paul makes a 'safe' separation of his mission and message, and his own self: ***'For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.'*** (2 Corinthians 4:5)

So it is not the global mission, but the personal outworking of faith and sharing Jesus, that is challenging. And there is no equation for it. Jesus had a unique message for each person, a unique path to the same destination: *Himself*.

How did Jesus know when to speak, what to speak? He tells us he did only what he saw and heard from the Father. (John 5:19) This is how Jesus was kept in perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3), and never afraid of new situations, new questions, even demonic spirits. We, too, are told when in the 'fight', and in challenging, testing moments, to ***'not prepare in advance what we are going to say...'*** (Luke 21:14-15), in order to leave space for the Spirit to speak to and through us.

I have personally experienced amazing moments by waiting a fraction of a second longer to respond to a question from someone about God. I remember once, when working in a bank, first job out of college, a guy shared with a group of us how he was going on a Zen Retreat, to a Buddhist resort. He then turned to me directly, knowing I was a Christian, and asked me in front of everyone: *'What do you think about this retreat, Peter?'* I remember that I deliberately paused, as the Lord had been speaking to me about waiting on him in the moment instead of trying to have all knowledge and answers in advance. The Holy Spirit dropped a 'path' and response to me directly. I said, *'Well, if you tell me what it is you are looking for at this retreat, I will then tell you why I think there is somewhere else you might find it.'* This guy smiled knowingly, and the conversation ended cordially at that point.

Another experience of this nature that the Spirit gave me was when a colleague at work challenged me about my Bible reading, and said, *'Aren't there lots of interpretations of the Bible? How do you know your understanding of it is correct...?'* I paused, waiting for the Spirit to move. He moved swiftly. I said, *'Yes, there are many interpretations. So how about this: why*

don't you read some of it, say the gospel of John, and share with me your interpretations?' He agreed, and over the coming weeks he did read a number of the books of the Bible.

I leave you with this: The more we obey Christ's 'primary' command – to love God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength (Matthew 22:36-40) – courage and desire to share Jesus, begins to overtake fear on the issue.

Do you fear witnessing, sharing Jesus? Focus less on 'others' at this time, and put more of your 'heart, soul, mind and strength' into loving God. Over time our eyes clear a little (Matthew 6:23), and our vision of what really matters, and what people really need and actually want, recalibrates. (Matthew 13:44)

There has been a popular quote out there, some think traces to St. Francis of Assisi. It goes like this: *'Share the gospel, and if necessary use words.'* When I hear this quoted, it is often in the context of trying to get out of using words, or subtly undermining those who verbally share the gospel. If this quote is for real, I like to think the original author was not implying that we speak less, but that we live it more, that the gospel is so deeply ingrained in our lifestyle – private and public – that it is one with the message.

We certainly do need to see in the church today, more integrity in the gospel we actually walk, not just what we talk. But a friend said it best when he said to me about this quote: ***'Why would you not want to speak the gospel? It is such a beautiful message and story!'***

#26

'We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.' (1 John 4:6)

Paul says something very interesting in 1 Corinthians 7 about the Spirit of God and truth; he writes, **'... I have no command from the Lord, but ... I, too, have the spirit of God.'** (vs. 25, 40) Paul, here, is casting vision for us on the multi-layers of knowing God, walking with God, the nature of God speaking to and through us. Paul speaks with authority on the basis that he has the spirit of God in himself, and with this comes a renewed mind, spirit-informed power and 'judgment'. (1 Corinthians 7:25; Romans 8:11; 12:1-2)

But Paul distinguishes this from hearing directly from God. This is beyond confusing, because it is beyond understanding. It is, in fact, liberating. God is big, and the nature of **'Christ in you'** (Colossians 3:3) is deep. He speaks to you, and through you. His power is 'over' you, but it is also **'from within you.'** (John 7:37-38)

The verse above, 1 John 4:6, is extraordinary in that John is determining true and false spirit, based on people agreeing with him. He was aware and familiar with false prophets (Matthew 24:11), plausible but wrong arguments (Colossians 2:4), and even the devil dressed up to look like an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14) John did not busy himself past a point to prove or argue who is right and wrong.

John knew, like Paul, **'whom he had believed'** (1 Timothy 1:12), and he knew his call, his mission. And like Jesus, John here believes that those who come, believe and receive, were the ones the Father had sent. (John 6:37)

This looks like crazy, megalomaniac stuff, right? Well, only to those who don't agree, don't see. There will come a time, if it has not come to you already, where you, like John, will have to maintain that the Jesus you know is the Jesus who is true, and you will have to just stand back and wait for the angels to reap the true harvest. (Matthew 13:24-30) The basis of not only God's truth, but also of all creation, is *'revelation'*.

Remember that life itself was from 'spirit', a spoken word, and is now **'sustained by His powerful word.'** (Hebrews 1:3) God defined himself as 'Being' (Exodus 3:14), and this deposit of revelation is the purest form of true understanding: seeing, knowing, receiving, and letting go.

'In your light I see light.' (Psalm 36:9)

(End of Devotional: Seek)

Man Cannot Live On Bread Alone

'The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man.'

(GK Chesterton, 1874 – 1936)

Dedication: There is a river that runs down the very heart of heaven, crystal clear and from the throne of God. It is my earnest prayer that all five of my children – whatever comes between now and then – will all meet me on the banks of that river. I dedicate this devotional to them. (Rev 22:1-5)

Introduction:

When Jesus was starving in the desert, at the end of 40 days and nights of fasting, the Devil pressed his attention towards food. The devil tempted Jesus to exert his power and change a stone into bread. So much twisted in this place and space.

Jesus was hungry and faint beyond all bounds of normal, and his mind and soul would have been wavering and weak. The temptation in this weak moment was not only the prospect of food (*would this not have been a tempting prospect with or without the devil's prompting?*), but rather that compelling need, in his desperate frailty, to prove to the devil who He was, by accepting – and thereby bowing down to - his challenge.

Do you struggle with who you are, and who says, and proving this to self and others by listening and responding to disingenuous challenges? Do you try to answer questions in your head – not

real ones posed by real people, but theoretical ones that might be asked and might be difficult to answer? Do people say, or does the devil himself come to you, and accuse? Accusation is typically about things actually done, but the spirit of accusation is a false spirit. Accusation hides in the real but condemns with no authority. The devil is the accuser of Christians. (Revelation 12:10)

Jesus did not need to prove anything to the devil. So he spoke *over* him, not to him, simply stating the truer truth, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, ***‘Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word the Lord speaks.’***

This short devotional has 26 entries. My passion is not only the Word of God, but also the power of God – both of which, Jesus tells us, are needed for real understanding. (Matthew 22:29)

I hope these reflections are inspiring to you in your eternal walk with Jesus.

#1

'Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.' (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Jesus reminded us of this Scripture when he was half-starved and possibly losing his mind. (Matthew 4:4) Jesus was at the tail end of forty days of fasting, and if that was not enough in itself, it was at this point of weakness the devil assailed him and challenged his identity: ***'If you are the Son of God you will...'*** Even at this point of losing all that life is – i.e. his own physical life through starvation – Jesus whispered the words to the heavenlies and to generations past, present and future: ***'Man cannot live on bread alone.'***

We live here on earth; we eat, drink and work hard. Life presses in on us with tremendous pressure, pace and demand, partly capitalizing on the fact that the *'ground is cursed'* and only through such toil can we survive. (Genesis 3:17) And yet this state of affairs is because of the schism between man and God. Life was never meant to be consumed with itself – *'running to stand still'* (U2) – but was purposed in being one with God. Jesus, through his blood, has made that union with God possible again, and His presence is felt through His Spirit. (Romans 5:5; Ephesians 1:14)

Everything Jesus spoke, lived and demonstrated was 'spirit' (John 6:63), and He calls us to fight against even the torment of the flesh to hold to that treasure, now and forevermore. (Matthew 13:44)

#2

'Your love is better than life.' (Psalm 63:3)

We become most truly who we are by emptying ourselves of self.

Jesus said, **'Anyone who loses his life for me and the gospel will save it.'** (Mark 8:35) This is the picture of going *against* the grain of the flesh – which is completely consistent with not only the message of Christ, but his own life.

Here on earth we strive to be somebody, to notch up achievements and accolades, to fill out that resume of self, that retirement for our future - only here; but Paul says, **'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...'** (Galatians 2:20) I think this 'loss of life' and life's values, is intrinsic to Paul's secret in being content with plenty or in want. (Philippians 4:12)

One Scripture can feed into the spirit of a truth from many angles, and many truths can find a footing in the same Scripture. Jesus' words were living, they were 'spirit'. (John 6:63) There have been many that have lost their very lives, preferring God's love to life (Psalm 63:3), but this is because they first found that life in God's love.

No matter where you are at on the spectrum of life and its challenges today, Jesus is the door (John 10:9), and his love is better than life.

#3

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

This paradoxical line – that pretty much unravels the very core of existence – follows Jesus' rebuke to Peter, saying, ***'Get behind me Satan.'*** (Mark 8:33)

Peter had tried to counter Jesus' words about his own forthcoming suffering, and was met with this strong rebuke. I have never been rebuked like this, nor rebuked another like this – it just would not feel Jesus-like, and yet it would be, ironically, Jesus-literal.

I think we often overlook the strength with which Jesus valued ***'the things of God'*** versus ***'merely human concerns.'*** (vs 33) Following this, Jesus spoke to his disciples, and to us today, these words about the real road to know and take hold of life, and that is, in losing our life for him and for his gospel.

Many people throughout history – and even this day – have lost their physical lives for their faith. This reflection is not supposed to depress you, or cast a shadow on your soul. It is, I hope, a freeing concept, even if a little scary! I hope and pray that the direct words of Christ will give you a sense that it is 'OK' to be serious about your faith, sober, and not too hung up on making your faith jive with 'merely human concerns'.

We are called to 'love', and even Paul says that he was ***'taking pains to do what was right, not***

only in the eyes of God but also in the eyes of man.' (2 Corinthians 8:21) This is not the same as compromise or being lukewarm. So be free! Throw off what holds you back from loving and walking with Jesus, and know that God does call us to go straight, go strong, and choose him and the gospel over temporal matters of this life.

#4

'...choose for yourselves today whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.' (Joshua 24:15)

The question is where do I set up camp. Life has so much to offer, genuinely, and to entice, disingenuously.

Winds blow through your very soul day after day, pulling you in directions of differing kingdoms – the kingdom of this world and its values, the kingdom of God and his values. There comes a time where we need to decide, *'cut our cloth'*, stake a flag, set up camp. Here we decide that we will do life.

It is here – in choosing to serve the Lord - we will know joy, peace, satisfaction. Here, or nowhere! If what we want to experience cannot be experienced here with Jesus, we will forego the experience! ***'Be either hot or cold. If you are lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth.'*** (Revelation 3:16)

This is a very freeing concept to me personally. I struggle with the push and pull of life. Jesus *does* want us here in the world, but he does not want us to be ***'of the world.'*** (John 17:15) So how do we do life? How do we straddle being both here but not ***'of the world'***?

Answer: Know and claim your citizenship in heaven. And do life here as a foreigner, a courteous and appreciative sojourner. (1 Peter 2:11; Philippians 3:20)

#5

'Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'
(Ezekiel 37:9)

This verse comes from the powerful description in Ezekiel 37 referred to as *'The Valley of Dry Bones'*. Ezekiel is called to prophesy that bones of the dead come together, and they do! On the bones tendons, flesh and skin also appear. From the prophesy, the bodies are fully formed, but there is a moment when **'...there was no breath in them.'** (vs 8) Life without life. Then as a separate moment and separate call, or prophesy, breath is called forth **'from the four winds... that they may live.'**

Ecclesiastes 12 also portrays a sharp reminder that our very ability to choose or deny God, comes from spirit and life that he has decreed to and through us. It reads, **'Remember your creator... before the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.'** (Ecclesiastes 12:1,7)

Colossians chapter 1 says of Jesus, **'He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together...'** (vs 17), and Paul closes out Romans 11 with, **'From him and through him and to him are all things.'** (vs 36)

This reflection on God's power behind and before us is not to derail us into philosophical musings on determinism or the word 'sovereign'. No. This picture of God before and behind is to cut us loose in his wind and spirit. It is to set us flowing in a river of life, knowing that God's breath is in the very heart of our own breath, carrying us

through life and in the eternal. (cf John 8:3; 7:37-38)

#6

'I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live but Christ lives in me...'

(Galatians 2:20)

One of the most confounding and yet completely central concepts and truths of Christianity is losing one's life to find life. (Mark 8:35) It is an oxymoron, not just a paradox. It is a contradiction in terms. It is, as it were, a crucifixion and resurrection. But it is the unavoidable portal to life; it is Jesus the door (John 10:9) – which *is* death and resurrection.

John the Baptist said of Jesus, ***'He must become more, and I must become less.'*** (John 3:30)

Interestingly, Jesus, in order to reach us, ***'emptied himself'*** of his deity, and ***'became nothing.'*** (Philippians 2:6-7) And we are called to empty ourselves of self to become Jesus.

Whatever it was about life and our rebellion against God, something in us reached to grasp and hold our very self. This is the essence of the Fall. This holding on to self is the spirit of death in our lives, until our physical lives also die. Paul, in above verse, describes a freedom that is indescribable, and actually more of a journey than a reality this side of glory. So in Christ we are, in fact, not here but ***'hidden with God'*** (Colossians 3:3); but while we are here on earth, together with Paul, ***'we strive on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of us...'***

(Philippians 3:13) We soldier on, as Paul also admonished Timothy (1 Timothy 6:12); we persevere every step, as Christ Himself admonished the churches in Revelations

(chapters 2 & 3); we '***strive to enter that rest.***'
(Hebrews 4:11)

We live to '*no longer live.*' (Galatians 2:20)

#7

'We walk by faith, not by sight...'

(2 Corinthians 5:7)

Nothing in life, in itself, makes sense. And yet we can explain life only *within* the terms and parameters of life itself.

So, for example, we explain *why* things evolved the way they did, working back from what we see now that things 'have' evolved. At best, our explanations of 'why' life is as it is, is like our 'hind-sight' descriptions of why we should have done what we should have done – it works back from a *given* result. We are *in* life (or inside the dome of life), and we can only see with 'life eyes'. We can only see and think *within* life's framework. It is impossible to explain life from outside life itself.

So let me rephrase the opening line: Everything in life, in itself, makes sense – when we believe and accept that life was made with purpose.

Life matters! How do I know this? Because when I floundered in the pain and darkness of life, with the question of its meaning coursing through my veins, God, life's Designer, *became* a man like me, and walked life in poverty, and died a cruel death. If life did not have meaning laced through its very core, God would not have come and lived it, validated every part of it, from eating, drinking, working, serving and suffering.

So in faith I rise this day, and step out in confidence that life matters, because Jesus the cross. And I know the story of its full redemption

and healing is being played out. (*That's not a typo, 'because Jesus and the cross'; it is not because 'of' Jesus and the cross, it is because Jesus and cross. John 17:3*)

#8

'...If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes.' (Luke 19:42)

'I will be like a lion... I will tear them to pieces and go away... until they have borne their guilt and seek my face...' (Hosea 5:14-15)

We are the true Israel, but we seem to overlook God's passion for righteousness and his discipline towards Israel. We'll take the Messiah and the name, but excuse ourselves from the judgment. This is deceit. We need to be so careful in this **'sinful and adulterous generation'**, that we do not misuse the grace of God (Mark 8:38; Jude 4), mishandle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), and overlook the warnings of Jesus to the churches. (Revelation 2-3)

In the early church there was infiltration of false teaching, love of money and sexual immorality. (Galatians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 5:1; Acts 5:1-11). Does this state of affairs sound familiar? Judgment begins with the believers (1 Peter 4:17), so for this reason, as Peter says, **'let us live holy and godly lives.'** (2 Peter 3:11)

Although this angle on life in Christ might seem dour, it is a stand that is critical so the light of redemption and peace might be true and unsullied. It was for the **'joy set before him that Christ endured the cross'** (Hebrews 12:2); and we need that same, deep faith, knowing that our sufferings now – sufferings in shunning evil and denying ourselves the flesh – are not to be compared with our joy then. (Romans 8:18) This

walk on the narrow road is not a punishment, but
a path to glory.

#9

'Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist - denying the Father and the Son.'
(1 John 2:22)

A key challenge in our walk with Jesus is to discern what is really *of* Him, and what is not. What is really Him, and what is not.

There are false prophets (Matthew 7:15), and the most disconcerting thing is when someone false does not know or think they are false. The Bible does teach us and warn us that our own consciences can become **'seared'**, and we can lose our own compass of right and wrong. (1 Timothy 4:2; Romans 1:21) So how do you know that the Jesus you believe in, is true? Well, you know by the Spirit He has given you (Ephesians 1:14; Romans 5:5); you know by the fruits of the Spirit in your life (Matthew 7:20; Galatians 5:22-23); you know His voice (John 10:27), and you know because you acknowledge that **'Jesus is the Christ'** – that is, the mysterious 'one with God' that scripture clearly teaches, and that He claimed to be. (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; John 8:58/Exodus 3:14; 10:33; 14:11; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:3)

When all is said and done, you know that you are knowing the true Him because He has made Himself known to you. His revelation to your spirit, His light in your eyes. (Matthew 6:23; Psalm 36:9) So even if you falter in your faith and your own sense of confidence in knowing Him – as did John the Baptist (Luke 7:20) – He holds you, and will save you on that day. So my confidence is not so

much in my knowing Him, but in Him knowing me.

'...God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his"...' (2 Timothy 2:19)

#10

'His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms...' (Ephesians 3:11)

As followers of Christ we find ourselves with many motives for making Him known – all good, perhaps, but some more timeless than others.

When we make Jesus known so that people might find and hold salvation - this is compelling, and on God's heart (Luke 10:2), and we should fan this passion into flame and drag our flesh up that road. But sometimes this can become a motivation in itself and leave us focused on others and ourselves (i.e. 'their' salvation and 'our' responsibility in that).

When we ***'minister God's grace'*** in other forms, such as serving and mercy, we spread the fragrance of Jesus and often see and enjoy the fruit in what we are investing in – such as a better community, stronger church, more peaceful streets. This, too, is on God's heart and should flood us with satisfaction. (1 Peter 4:10; Micah 6:8; Psalm 94:16)

However, there is a deep, deep motivator and energizer in walking with Jesus and making Him known, and that is to celebrate and vindicate the eternal spirit and blood of Christ, so that God is pleased, and Heaven sings. As today's verse states, the purpose of the church is to make His wisdom known – the cross of Jesus – not only here and now, but to the heavenly spheres and bodies.

This is a river to swim in, a wind to be carried on, a dimension outside of any particular outcome of your witness today, or your service in Jesus' name. He said if we believed in Him, not that we would 'bag' or 'bottle' this or that, but that **'streams of living water would flow from within...'** (John 7:37-38)

'From Him and through Him and to Him are all things...' (Romans 11:36)

#11

'... your life is now hidden with Christ in God...' (Colossians 3:3)

Our confidence and joy in this life is from a source outside of this life. This 'life' or 'spirit' is the fount of the faith, the source of our message, our hope and our inspiration even here – but is not *from* here.

'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth...' (Matthew 6:10) We have **'saved our life'** even here, but must not forget this was and is through **'losing our lives'** even here. (Mark 8:35) Our life in Christ is truly a life with one foot in the world, and one foot in heaven – and the step is in the direction of heaven.

Life here should be the lesser of the 'real'. Paul says, **'I would rather depart and be with Christ'** (Philippians 1:23), and also speaks of creation itself **'groaning'** for the renewal of all things. (Romans 8:22) Paul also speaks of striving forward in that direction (Phil 3:14), with eyes not on the temporal but the eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18).

The author of Hebrews tells us the only striving we should do is in the direction of His 'rest'. (Hebrews 4:11) In Christ we are most truly in heaven, of heaven – **'...now hidden... in God.'** – and less truly here on earth. We should be living in tune with this, faithful to this, doing life here as the transient, less sure, less valuable, as compared with our truest identity, citizenship and investment.

Where are you, and who are you, most *truly* this day?

'...God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.' (Ephesians 2:6).

#12

'... darkness is as light to You.' (Psalm 139:12)

When the sun goes down, and the dust of life settles on our soul, there can be moments of deep darkness and fear. Maybe something you heard that day, or saw, or a situation or conflict brewing, might have that dark and dangerous spirit in it and through it. We fear. Even in the life of one person, one day, darkness can descend on the soul. How much more on a cosmic level!

Jesus admonished us to not be 'alarmed' when we hear of wars and rumors of wars. (Mark 13:7) These things, Jesus said, **'must happen'**. This is not to say that such violence and harm does not matter to God, or we should shake it off. On the contrary, God wants us to fight injustice (Micah 6:8; Psalm 94:16); but it does mean that despite the broken, destructive core of this world, there is a redemption that is stronger and we need not fear. Jesus, in the face of danger and sword, continually spoke peace to people, continually called us to **'not fear'**. (John 14:1)

On a practical level, therefore, let us set our faces like flint towards the fight, as Jesus did towards Jerusalem on route to his own crucifixion. (Luke 9:51) The light is stronger than the darkness, and we must claim that light and stake its flag in the heart of those dark places. This is to set a light on a hill, and cast it over those lost in darkness. (Luke 8:16) We know the power of the light. We know that **'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it'** (Psalm 24:1), and this includes the 'darkness'. We must assail those dark places, casting fear aside, in faith and in victory to reach

people buried there. (1 John 4:18)

'All souls are mine.' (Ezekiel 18:4)

#13

'I want to know Christ... and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering...' (Philippians 3:10)

Not long ago (sad to say!), my dad and I actually argued – yes, argued, the type that needs a subsequent apology – about why Moses had not been allowed to enter the promised land. Was it because he struck the rock at Meribah, or did he strike the rock because of the true failing? Numbers 20:12 indicates that it was a heart issue, ***'...because you did not trust me enough to treat me as holy in the sight of the people...'*** However, the striking of the rock 'twice' is a clearly specified component of the story. *(To initiate your own meaningless debate, take it up from Numbers 20. Don't forget to reference Matthew 22:29 and John 5:39-40)*

Ok, well, I think the following is a much more inspiring story line regarding Moses' suffering and discipline. Right before Moses died, he was taken up to a mountain to look at and over the land of Canaan, the land he would *not* enter. Like seeing heaven, but not being allowed in.

God, the merciful and loving, He who considered Moses the ***'most humble man on the face of the earth'*** (Numbers 12:3) and spoke to him as a friend, face to face (Exodus 33:11); God who avenged Moses fiercely when anyone undermined him, including his own sister (Numbers 12), this God would not retract his discipline from Moses. He let him see the promised land, but not go in.

It was after this moment, that Moses is taken by

God. He dies, and no one finds his body. (Deuteronomy 34) He died, as it were, yearning - not with joy, but with a joy set before him. The next we read of Moses alive is when he appears beside Jesus, together with Elijah at the transfiguration. (Matthew 17) The purpose of this meeting seems similar to that of the apparition of the angels in the garden of Gethsemane, and that was to encourage and strengthen Jesus as he faced trial and death. (Luke 22:43)

Moses appeared, as it were, to encourage Jesus to be strong in foregoing joy on earth, and instead to keep his eyes on the joy set before him, to hold out for the true Canaan, as Moses had. Moses had gone before Christ, as it were, shared in his suffering (Philippians 3:10), fellowshipped with him, and died to rise and stand with Christ himself as a true friend – the friend he had always been.

#14

'My eyes are ever on the Lord, for He alone will free my feet from the snare.' (Psalm 25:15)

In that almost chilling story of Peter stepping out of the boat, ***'shortly before dawn'***, to walk towards Jesus who they had thought might be a ghost, we glimpse a dark, powerful picture of being near to Jesus. It was when Peter was in arms' reach that the winds eclipsed his vision and fear made his feet fail. He began to sink when close to Jesus, not when far from Him. (Matthew 14:22-33)

Faith, not sight. God will sometimes leave a thorn in our side so that we will have to concertedly choose by faith where we stand. Not necessarily the comfortable position - in self and identity - but the true one. His grace is sufficient to stand here, and also his power (not ours) is made perfect here.

Is there something about yourself that you just can't feel, but you know is true? Were you lied to all your life about who you really are, so that your head hangs low when you know your chin should be lifted? Have you made choices and taken paths that corroded your sense of self through sin, and now find it very hard to 'feel' that you are a new creation?

Well, God is in the process of making all things new, but he calls us to claim his righteousness, and walk in it - in faith; and then he will shower it on us. (Hosea 10:12)

He calls us to not only gaze on him (feeling it!),

but to seek him when in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)
He calls us to know what is true, and if the thorn
is part of the revelation (2 Corinthians 12:10), to
prefer the pain and the right stand, over the
comfort but compromised spiritual positioning.

God calls us to know him in the storm and not
doubt (Matthew 14:31), to enjoy him in destitution
(Habakkuk 3:17-18), to cast fear out (1 John
4:18), to hold nothing sacred but his presence
(Psalm 73:25-26), his kingdom (Matthew 13:44),
and his cross. (1 Corinthians 2:2).

#15

'...I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!' (Mark 9:24)

My sister, Rebecca, once said to me, *'Peter, don't pursue a Godly life; pursue God!'* (she had noticed I was getting a little down, a little hard on myself and a little judgmental of others.)

Above verse – Mark 9:24 - is the cry of a desperate father, and a suspenseful, if not stressful moment in Scripture. It is the father's cry to Jesus, that Jesus might heal his son. Jesus does. But Jesus had challenged the man in his faith, saying all was possible to those who believed. At this moment the father not only expressed his belief, but recognized that if it all depended on the belief he had, it might not be enough, and how tragic it would be to lose out on the healing power of Jesus for lack of belief. So he did a wise, heart-felt thing – he stated his belief, and then cried to Jesus saying that if he was lacking, to please supply the extra measure, so that he would see done what he so longed to see done: the healing of his son.

I think we all feel that tension of faith, and all that it is and all that it means. It is a mysterious truth, a type of connection to God that is different to head knowledge or intellectual belief, and different to obedience, or good actions without heart.

On the one hand, ***'without faith it is impossible to please God'*** (Hebrews 11:6), and on the other, it is impossible to have a living faith without actions in its wake. (James 2:14)

All true faith is clearly tested, proven and expressed through action. (Matthew 7:20, Ephesians 2:10, Galatians 5:22-26) But action in itself, rule-keeping and even knowledge and reference of the Scripture, can be far from God. (John 5:39-40; Matthew 7:22-23)

So how do we know that our belief and our actions are expressions of true, God-honoring faith?

Well, truth is, if and when we are on track with the '*greatest commandment*', we rarely ask this question. Jesus admonished us, not to know all the rules and keep all the rules; he admonished us to '***Love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.***' (Matthew 22:36-40, quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5) So do not pursue good works, or lots of theology, or even solid faith. Pursue loving the Lord. True faith is love of God. And obedience and faith-action follows in the wake of this love relationship.

#16

'...To him be the glory forever! Amen.'

(Romans 11:36)

There is a deep-rooted need and desire to be understood and known. Even as Christians, where we have accepted that the gospel can be an offense to some (2 Corinthians 2:16), we want to be understood in our faith and its expression.

To be misunderstood, and/or misjudged, is a painful experience. When you feel people are viewing you as something you are not – the most classic experience being when you are being judged as wrong or unrighteous, when you are, in fact, upright and true – it is a type of curse or condemnation. It is almost a force against which to fight makes you the very thing you are fighting against. For example, if you are being told or treated as if you are proud and arrogant, when in fact you are being straight and upstanding, to continue being what and who you are almost feels like being proud or arrogant. And so we feel like shrinking back.

One of the most powerful weapons of a jealous man, or the devil, is to try to define *you* and your characteristics as self-centered, when they are in spirit humble and true.

The devil is an accuser and a liar. (Revelation 12:10; John 8:44) He will challenge the very core of who you are and call what is good, bad. He challenged Jesus' very identity (Matthew 4:1-11), and for Jesus to argue the fact would have been to surrender his identity. The devil's people called the Holy Spirit by which Jesus healed the sick, the

spirit of Beelzebub. (Matthew 12:24) When light is called darkness, it is tempting to switch that light off – and yet then there really is darkness!

How to walk in the light, when the light itself is mimicked by evil? (2 Corinthians 11:14) Simple – yet hard: we must live to bring Jesus glory, every day, every minute of the day, every relationship, every reaction.

If we truly believe and live the truth that **‘God knows those who are His’** (2 Timothy 2:19), we will be less concerned with proving to people what we are (good vs evil), and more concerned with simply what we know that God knows. His report, our satisfaction.

Remember, we considered Jesus **‘stricken by God’**. (Isaiah 53:4) We judged him wrongly, so do not allow yourself too much distress when others judge you wrongly. Just live for his glory, not your own.

#17

'... every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.' (John 15:2)

We yearn for safety. Jesus saw this in us, and though he pitied our plight, he called us to throw off shackles and walk in His wind and spirit, true life and true peace – though a 'green mile' here on earth. We can either be dead spiritually and safe in the world, or a dead man walking, and completely safe spiritually.

Jesus warned Nicodemus, **'The wind blows where it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'** (John 8:3)

Also to the earnest disciple who said he would follow Jesus anywhere, Jesus said, **'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.'** (Luke 9:58) Jesus tells us in Mark 8 and again in Luke 9 that **'to be his disciple'** we must truly consider life here an uncertain thing, and **'take up our cross daily.'** (Luke 9:23)

I was recently seeing in my own life the pattern of **'3 steps forward, 2 steps back.'** This phenomenon was to do with living life as an outspoken believer. My business cards – both for my counseling practice and my coffee biz – have verses on the back of them, and I align them, by the grace of God and a privilege given to me, with my faith. I have seen people approach me for my earthly skill sets in counseling/business, and then pull back due to my faith expression. There is a type

of dynamic attrition, 3 steps forward, 2 steps back. Or is this pruning?

I have never felt freer in my faith, and yet recently was fired by a secular organization for my witness on the job, and then fired by a church for my counsel in spirit and faith. I feel like I'm at the top of a fountain spout, where the water is high, but at its peak it is constantly peeling back and falling off. To be at the crest of the fountain spout, you will be in a motion of falling backwards. You will feel pruned, flesh exposed, free, maybe a tad chilled, where water meets sky, but strong and directional, growing and moving on up into the eternal.

#18

'... what we will be has not yet been made known...' (1 John 3:2)

Life is finite, and shot through with a ray of darkness. We have eternity stitched into our being and soul (Ecclesiastes 3:11), but because of the cut-off from life's source – due to our sin, and yielding our mortality – it feels as if there is an urgency *'to be'* or *'become'* here on earth, before we pass on to life hereafter.

We were never made to rush to be complete before we died. Death was never meant to be, and an end-point to life was never meant to be. So everything that death bears upon us – *fear, loss, time-ticking, striving to arrive or find self* – derives from a broken system. Paul writes to the church in Corinth, echoing the prophet Hosea, **'Death has lost its sting.'** (1 Corinthians 15:55)

The gospel is an arrow back through the heart of that dark 'shot', liberating life again into its eternal state. Death, and all that it is, has lost its sting by the blood of Jesus. Jesus says, **'The prince of this world stands defeated.'** (John 16:11)

So there is no longer a sprint to find life here, before life ends here - because life does *not* end here!

That said, there will be, and naturally should be, a constant *'becoming'* in our soul here on earth, rather than a false sense of having 'arrived', or pressure to find complete 'self' here and now.

We carry around a measure of being incomplete,

because we are incomplete. (1 Corinthians 13:9-10) In fact, Paul goes so far as to say that **'we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus...'** (2 Corinthians 4:10) This is not meant to be morbid, but rather to *dismiss* the morbid that sometimes lingers, and sometimes has purpose. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Let that broken part of your mind and heart, foretell those glories of complete, consummated redemption coursing through our future in the spheres and skies of heaven. **'Our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.'** (Romans 8:18)

When the Lord would not remove the thorn in Paul's side - something that hurt him and was weakness in him - Paul found here a trap door to even deeper 'being', through emptying himself of and in his weakness, that Christ's power might rest on him, define and be him. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Galatians 2:20)

#19

'Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?'

(2 Corinthians 11:29)

Moses was close to God, a prophet. (Hosea 12:13) He spoke with him as a friend, a privileged intimacy. (Exodus 33:11)

I don't know about you, but after I've done church or some other righteous deed, I feel like kicking back and taking a break from the spiritual; catch some football on TV, or whatever... In Exodus 33, Moses intervened for the people and wrestled with God, much like Jacob and the angel of God (Genesis 32:22-32; Hosea 12:4), and Moses, too, overcame. God changed his plan, and conceded Moses his request. (Exodus 33:14) At this point, rather than going to a camel race or throwing on a fire for some baked manna and dip, Moses leans into God further, cashes in. What does he want for all his virtue? He says to God, ***'Now show me your glory.'*** (Exodus 33:18) Moses wanted more of God, for all his trouble serving God.

We face temptation all day long. Paul, who was celibate as unto the Lord (*like Jesus was celibate as unto His Father*), was no stranger to the 'burn'. Even as one gifted for celibacy, Paul states, ***'Do I not inwardly burn?'***

These men of God had seen, and not let out of their sight, the vision of glory that not only eclipses all other beauty, but is the fount and source of all beauty in heaven and earth. Paul had seen a higher prize (2 Cor 12:1-9), and was now willing to suffer the thorn in his side to remain

standing in that vision, now and forevermore. It is for this reason that Jesus admonishes us to love God with all our heart, mind and strength. (Matthew 22:36-40; Deuteronomy 6:4-5) This is both a vision to catch, and a vision to pursue. (Psalm 27:4; Hosea 10:12; Matthew 13:44) When you see, you gaze; when the winds blow and you lose sight, you seek.

'Whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.' (Psalm 73:25-26)

#20

'The Lord bestows favor and honor...'

(Psalm 84:11)

We sold out Eden to be gods. The serpent's winning argument was not that we would avoid death – which was a lie – but that we would become like God, **'knowing...'** (Genesis 3:4-5)

When we unplugged ourselves from our life support machine - God Himself - death rushed in, to and through us, mind, body and soul. It is for this reason our road back is a mandate, not a natural inclination, to now love God with our mind, body and soul. (Matthew 22:36-40; Deut 6:4-5)

With our acquired *'knowing'*, we now wrestle constantly with what is true and false knowledge.

Solomon writes, **'with the increase of knowledge is the increase of sorrow.'**

(Ecclesiastes 1:18) I find bookstores both inspiring and despairing. There is a sense of the 'unique', that you and I can also express something original and create (all true, as you are an original stamp of God, Genesis 1:27); but also despairing in that there seems to be so much inane expression, so much pouring forth like blood spilling to the ground. Life wasted, not celebrated. Jesus said, **'When the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!'** (Matthew 6:23)

Life is from, to and through Jesus Christ. (Romans 11:36) We exist, not because we achieve or deserve. We were breathed forth by God and living and thriving long before we were asking, *'Who am I?'*

We need to get back to God's way of doing life, and God's way of naming people. Your truest self is a '**secret name**' that God gives you. (Revelation 2:17; 19:12)

We strive in 'self help', and so pour fuel on the flames of our pride and deceit. Stand, lift your eyes and hands to heaven, and acknowledge that God is the giver of life – *your* life.

Ask Him for blessing – don't strain up and down the corridors of your mind to find reasons why you deserve blessing. Thank Him for the good things you have and know – don't crawl through dark spaces of your soul trying to justify the good things you have and know. Ask God to anoint you and speak 'being' over your life and soul, to echo the deepest truth of God's own '**I AM**'. (Exodus 3:14)

Let go, and free fall into the arms of the Lord, and be in Him. (1 Timothy 4:5)

#21

'When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!''
(Matthew 27:54)

The late, great 'Mrs. Graham', said to me when I was 17 and beginning to take concerted steps in my faith and witness, ***'The blood of the saints is the seed of the church.'*** (a saying that references Revelation 6:11 and Psalm 116:15)

Moments after Jesus had died, the earthquake hit and eyes were opened. His blood still dripped warm, and the very guard at this side, perhaps the man who drove nails into his feet and hands, saw and professed that Jesus was the Son of God.

Jesus, while carrying the cross, uttered the most powerful words of redemption, forgiveness and deity, ***'Forgive them, for they know not what they do!'*** (Luke 23:34). Stephen, when being stoned, did the same thing, saying ***'Do not hold this sin against them!'*** (Acts 7:60)

It would seem that the very people who had Jesus to dinner, turned on him and crucified him. His own disciple, he who stood closest to him and saw many miracles first-hand, showed the truest essence of the heart of man: Judas could not stand to not be God, so he betrayed him over to death. (Luke 22:48)

Jesus never took from us, but only ever gave to us. He did not even take praise, because he

'knew what was in a man.' (John 2:24) Sure enough, even John the Baptist would doubt Him, Peter would deny Him, his disciples abandon Him. And you? Me? Jesus was a giver to the end, and only a giver. (Matthew 11:3; John 18:25)

So it would seem that Peter, when speaking to the crowd on the day of Pentecost, was truly seeing the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer for their forgiveness. Peter appears to be addressing the very people, the mob, that crucified Jesus: **'... this Jesus, whom you crucified... when they heard this they were cut to the heart... 'what shall we do?'**" (Acts 2:36-37)

Also, Stephen's prayer that the sin of stoning him would not be held against the people, was fulfilled literally. Paul, who had been Saul, was standing there approving, even authorizing Stephen's stoning. (Acts 8:1) And as you know, Saul came to see Jesus, receive the name, Paul, and go to change the world for Jesus.

#22

'...He made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him – the dark rain clouds of the sky....' (Psalm 18:11)

We cannot live eternally till we die to this temporal life. (Galatians 2:20; Mark 8:35) We cannot die physically till we are ready to live eternally. (John 8:24)

But most God-like is the complete impossible, the irrational, the pure, that which stands on Word, not a word that stands on reason – we cannot truly live in this temporal life, till we die to the values of this temporal life. (*John 11:25-26; Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:15-20; Isaiah 1:18; Matthew 19:26; Hebrews 11:6*)

At this point we do indeed live. By faith. True freedom. (John 8:36)

God made darkness. It is His, and it is holy. There is darkness in your soul that was once pure, but has been hijacked by the essence of blindness. There is nothing more cloaking and comforting than the thickest of darkness.

When Peter walked on water and was closest to Jesus, the winds howled and he lost sight of Jesus and began to sink. He was not far from him, and began to sink; he was closer than anyone else on earth at that moment, and was stepping in faith. (Matthew 14:22-33) And it is interesting to note that Jesus came out to the disciples on the water at the darkest hour (*'just before dawn...'*), and they thought he was a ghost and were terrified and cried out. Throughout

scripture angels appeared and people quaked, with a fear that might look like and feel like an unholy terror, but was holy. (*Daniel 8:17,27; 2 Samuel 6:8-9; Luke 1:29; 24:37*)

There is a stillness of mind that is deep and it is sound. (Psalm 46:10; 42:7) As we go deep with God, we might feel and fear that something is not good – might be depression or despair – when in fact, it may be of a pure nature and spirit.

The devil masquerades as an angel of light, and he has also imaged darkness and made it evil. (2 Corinthians 11:14) If you walk with Jesus, then nourish on His Word, commune with His spirit, do not shirk every feeling of fear. Stop for a minute. Remember, you have nothing to fear. So now, in holiness, the dark might be a proximity to the Lord, a very deep, safe and warm space.

‘... for darkness is as light to You.’
(Psalm 139:12)

#23

'Favor and honor come from Lord.'

(Psalm 84:11)

We have an idea of 'favor' and 'honor'. Often it looks a lot like earthly favor and honor. And this can be the case, accolades, riches, health.

Sometimes throughout scripture there is a season of long-suffering faith, and then it is as if the Lord parks the trial and even the season of thick spirituality, and pours out life like Eden. *(I think of Job, at the end of the walk and trial, God draws a line, says enough, and pours out prosperity on him)*

But in scripture – and therefore in life today – we also see 2 other types of 'favor and honor'. We see one that is simply 'other', not only different but opposite to all things of this earthly kingdom, a joy in suffering. *(Habakkuk 3:17-18; James 1:2; Philippians 3:10; Hebrews 11:35; Acts 5:41)*

And then we see a more nuanced, hybrid of 'favor and honor', and that is goodness and good things, but in and through a testimony to God. In this type of 'favor and honor', God does not 'park' spirituality to the left and reward you on the right; but rather He does a combination of witness and reward. I think of Joseph, called before Pharaoh, to interpret the dream. Pharaoh was considered and treated as a god by the Egyptians. To treat him other than this was to risk one's life.

However, when Joseph is called to stand before him, and Pharaoh said to him, *'I have heard it said that you can interpret dreams'*, Joseph takes a bold stand in both how he responds to this, and

how he loads his response. He says, ***'I cannot do it... but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.'*** (Genesis 41:16) This response was to both deny Pharaoh his view of Joseph (*Joseph was not going to accept flattery on false terms, as if he was powerful in himself*), and it was to not acknowledge Pharaoh as the highest deity, but a God other than him, that would be the source of this satisfaction. In this and through this testimony, God set Joseph apart and that day elevated him from prisoner to second-in-command of the most powerful nation of the world.

'He who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God...' (Luke 12:8-9)

#24

'The prince of this world stands defeated.'

(John 16:11)

We walk with Jesus on an eternal path. We are not walking with Jesus on a merely temporal, finite path. We are not walking, believing and obeying for just today's benefit, or the fruits of this faith tomorrow, but rather because to know Him, serve Him and love Him is ***'eternal life'***. (John 17:3)

Our life in Christ is an eternal investment, banking everything – all sacrifice and suffering – for an eternal harvest, prayers in the closet, testimony in the market square, raising children, giving water to the thirsty. (*Matthew 6:5; Luke 12:8-9; 1 Timothy 2:15; Mark 9:41*) Our walk is on display to the spirit realms, we always have a ***'cloud of witnesses'*** beyond number, to show the skies above and hell below that the blood of Jesus is the wisdom of God. (Eph 3:10; Hebrews 12:1)

In some respect our experience here is like when a war is declared over. There is wreckage on all sides, but a peace descends, is complete and final, but is also only beginning. There will be years and toil and grief and even continued collateral and loss due to the extent of the damage and the darkness, but all things are being made new. (Revelation 21:5)

Jesus said in that darkest moment on the cross, ***'It is finished.'*** (John 19:30) It is for this reason now, that the ***'path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, ever brighter till the full light of day.'*** (Proverbs 4:18) The war is ended,

even death has lost its sting. (1 Corinthians 15:55)

Now we need to walk in and towards the light until indeed, all things are new – new body, new heaven, new earth, no more tears, sorrow or death, and a river crystal clear running through the city street. (Revelation 21:1-5; 22:1-5)

Jesus said to her, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*** (John 11:25-26)

#25

'Remember your creator before... the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.' (Ecclesiastes 12:1,6-7)

Have you ever seen a 'dreamcatcher'? These are little, woven crafts that look like a mini, decorated spider web. You can look up their origin. The popular use of these things, and their meaning, is to 'catch' bad dreams, keep them out of your head.

I was stuck in traffic recently, and found myself staring at the shiny, luxury car in front of me. It was pristine and glistened in the sunlight. Everything about the car said life is good, money is not an issue, the sun shines and the skies are blue – even if the sun is not out, and the skies are grey.

This car beat the system, and the blues. But then a small, decorated dreamcatcher caught my eye, swinging off the mirror over the dashboard. But even this dreamcatcher was pretty, tight, finite, in its place, boxed out. It was as if this car owner had recognized that despite life's goodness and the car's report, there was some bad stuff, but we'll catch it and relegate it to this little 99-cent dreamcatcher. There badness will stay. On with *'life is good'...*

This is positive, and makes for a good cook-out and ballgame spirit, but is not real life and soul. Our victory over darkness does not have to come by denying the power of darkness, or trying to minimize it, dismiss it, relegate it to a cheap craft.

We can look at darkness square in the face, because it ***'has lost its sting.'*** (1 Corinthians 15:55)

There is darkness, and it is dark! But we are told in Hebrews, that there is a blood that speaks a better word than the blood of murder. (Hebrews 12:24) Jesus is not good news because he distracts us from bad dreams, or pretends they do not matter. He is good news because His light and truth and battle cry, is stronger, and has defeated the darkness. (*Hosea 13:14; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Philippians 4:8*)

'Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning... For to us a child is born...'
(Isaiah 9:5-6)

26

'And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." 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)

How do we put a smile on God's face? If He was watching you this moment, and you knew that He will vindicate you and smiles over you, how would you walk, talk, tackle this thing? With confidence! With your head held high!

What if he was watching and you knew that He knew the true you (2 Timothy 2:19; Revelation 2:17), and could see right through mimicry, the false prophet, the jealous man, the liar at your side? You would not waver in the face of these forces. Like Jesus setting his face like a flint towards Jerusalem, you would set your sights on the light that is Jesus, and you would not bother to prove yourself, to even distinguish yourself from the false report around you, because you would not need ***'man's testimony about man.'*** (John 2:24)

You live not to even feel alive, but to honor God and stand in the light of faith that He beams down on you. Where is faith from above, shining over your life today? Where is His grace for you to stand and walk in? (James 4:6)

Like a replaced knee or hip, you walk it, and move it in submission against pain, because the pain is not the guide or indicator of what needs to happen for the good of that new joint. What do you believe about yourself? Do you believe God's

report about you, or your own mind's report, friends' report, parents' report?

Your own heart can condemn you. (1 John 3:20)
We need to, as Paul admonishes us, **'take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.'** (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Sometimes you will be 'feeling it', and then go with the flow. But other times the true place to be will be with a thorn in your side. (2 Corinthians 12:9) There will be faith you have, but a measure you also *need*, in order to see done what you know needs doing. And this is the will of God for you. At this time you must claim what you have and reach for more. (Mark 9:24)

There will be times in the courts of God you see Him, and at these times you 'gaze'. At other times, even in the courts of God – in your faith and obedience – you will not see or feel Him, and at these times you 'seek'. (Psalm 27:4,8; Hebrews 4:11)

'I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me... forgetting what is behind and straining for what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.' (Philippians 3:12-14)

(End of Devotional: Man Cannot Live on Bread Alone)

SOAR

'It is fellowship with Christ that causes the heart to burn again.' (J.C. Ryle)

I dedicate this devotional to Jesus Christ. He lives. He is my best friend. He speaks to me. He protects me and walks with me. He gives me visions of true beauty. He speaks a name and report over my life that is truer than any other report that my own heart, history or actions might speak. (*Jn 15:15; 10:27; Mt 28:20; Jer 33:3; Rev 2:17; 1 Jn 3:20*)

Introduction:

Why 'Soar'? When I think of my life and my faith, my craving is to 'soar'. From a young age I have felt the graft and grind of the soul. Life on the 'outside' can be easy at times, but really 'hell' and 'heaven' start and stop in the depth of our being, in our soul.

When Jesus promised '**streams of living water**' to those who believed, he said these waters would '**flow from within...**' (Jn 7:37-38) This is a life source that wells up from within you, and flows up and out. This is not just the picture of a refreshing that flows *over* you – which is also on offer, and powerful. But this flow '**from within**' is where Christ becomes one with you, and wells up from the core of your being. This is complete. This is beyond 'answers' for the mind, beneath the record of our past, and truer than the 'truths' of life's disparities and injustices. Here is where we can stand and be and live amidst this broken

world and broken souls, and **'be kept in perfect peace'** even as Jesus was in perfect peace. (Is 26:3)

Jesus 'felt' life and 'felt' the 'lost' more than any mortal ever will, and yet he could sleep at night. He could enjoy a feast. He could take time with just one individual in the midst of a needy crowd. There is profound freedom here, and it **'soars'**. It free falls. It is in the eternal winds of God, and it is available to us, and honors God that we discover it, have it, hold it.

There's a 'soaring' in our walk and knowledge of Jesus and his truth. There is a 'soaring' in living out our 'spiritual gift'. (1 Pe 4:10-11) There is a 'soaring' that is completely defiant of life's circumstances, and we see this from Genesis to Revelation, because to soar in Christ is like the peace of Christ - **'not as the world gives.'** (Jn 14:27)

Paul, in his moment of internal glory, after having seen visions of God by the will of God that were beyond expression, is left standing with a **'thorn in his side.'** This was no minor discomfort, or disconcerting status; it was a demon sent to torment him. (2 Cor 12:7) To be close to God, to wrestle with and even 'overcome', leaves some with a semblance and experience of a limp. (cf. Gen 32:22-32)

Peter, walking on water, when at his closest to Christ both physically and in faith, was overcome with fear and doubt and began to fail and sink. Jesus reached out and grabbed him, and asked him, **'Why did you doubt?'** (Mt 14:22-33) John, after having retired strong from ministry, storming

the powers that be with pointed rebuke for immorality, was left thinking in his suffering, and doubt and 'offense' at Christ clouded his heart and mind. (cf Mt 11:1-11, note vs.6)

To draw near to Jesus – where there is most freedom (Jn 8:36) – is to walk in the winds of God's Spirit: there is God's peace here, but there is also God's holiness, Christ's suffering, Christ having become sin for people (2 Cor 5:21), God's unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16), his dwelling in **'thick darkness.'** (1 Kings 8:12) To reach for closeness with Jesus Christ, is to become more like him, and experience more of what he is and 'how' he is.

(Jn 5:19; 6:37; Mt 9:36; Mk 10:16; Jn 2:1-12; Heb 4:11; Mt 13:44)

#1 Arid Places

There are places and spaces in our lives - every day - where the 'arid', the 'desolate', blows through.

Memories. Regrets. Lonely job. Lonely road. We spend a lot of energy and resources either dealing with these 'desert places', or trying to avoid meeting them in our minds and hearts.

Two points on this: First, the spirit of the 'arid' and the 'desolate' comes from mankind being cut off from the life and Spirit of God. In essence it is the spirit of death. And ultimately we do die.

Here is the second point, and the good news! Jesus came - God in the form of mankind - to bring life to the 'arid' space, the 'desolate' place. And ultimately to defeat physical death - to give us life eternal!

Here and now you can invite Jesus into your life, and let his spirit pour into those arid places. He takes the '*sting of death*' out of the 'desolate' here and now, and he takes the 'sting of death' out of death itself.

For this reason when we '**die in Christ**', we come back to life and live forever! (1 Cor 15:55; Gen 3:5-6; Galatians 2:20)

Jesus said, '**Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life.**' (Jn 5:24)

#2 The God Filter (Mt 6:23)

I snap lots of photos on my phone. If I go to upload them to social media, I have lots of 'filter' options. The content of the photo is the same, but the filter options give the 'content' a new light, a different feel, a different emphasis, impact, message.

In many ways our lives here on earth have the same option, and challenge. We have a world filter and a Christ filter available to us all the time. How we 'see' and understand – and therefore respond – depends on what filter we are seeing through.

Throughout scripture we have many instances and admonishments to 'see' in a different way. I think of Joshua, Caleb and the other spies that went into the land of Canaan. (Num 13-14) There were 2 opposing ways to 'see' – or interpret – what they had seen.

One way saw the goal, and saw the God that was leading. The other way saw only the challenges and dangers, without God's goals, his faithfulness or his presence. I also think of the story of Elijah and his servant. Read 2 Kings 6, you won't be disappointed!

Jesus is light – not just on eyes, but 'out' eyes. Yes, in the same way he is living water, not just over our soul, but up out of our soul. (Jn 7:37-38)

'The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!' (Mt 6:22-23)

Devotional Activity:

God as light is absolutely key! Light – filters – change everything! Here are some verses to look up and ponder. Take it all in. Accept it all. It is all God's!

John 1:1-5

John 1:9

John 8:12

1 John 1:5

1 Timothy 6:16

Psalm 139:12

2 Samuel 22:29

Amos 4:13

1 Kings 8:12

Matthew 5:14

#3

'In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.' (Romans 8:26)

'Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.' (Romans 8:34)

In Exodus 17 Moses is commanded by God to lift his hands over the battle, the whole time, the whole way. When his hands were lifted, there was victory in the battle. When his hands fell to his side with fatigue, his people began to lose the battle. God did not mind if Moses needed help in this. (*Ever asked others to pray for you?*) Aaron, his brother, and Hur, held his hands up for him. But one way or another, the people had to have lifted hands in faith, in order to see victory.

This morning I was tired. Tired of asking God to open the way for my 'message' (Col 4:3), to open the path for 'new things' (Is 43:19) – all of which I believe God is doing, and that he is calling me to pray for, to believe for.

But I was tired. I prayed and asked Jesus – referencing above verse, Romans 8:34 – that he would pray for me, that he would open the way, make it happen. And all of a sudden I realized something: God himself makes 'life' and 'victory' happen by prayer and faith - the prayers and faith of the Spirit and of Christ. My life 'opens', and my ministry 'flows', because someone is holding their hands up over the battle. If not me, if not other Christians, then Christ and the Spirit are

believing, praying, asking, and holding up a victory.

Remember, all life happens by God's word. (Heb 11:3; 1:3; Col 1:15-20) There is not an 'automatic' flow of life, or spiritual life. Someone is making it happen by faith, by will, by God's favor.

'You have not because you ask not.'

(James 4:2)

So I found fresh fervor this morning, to not doubt, but to stand with Christ, with the Spirit, in asking God for a move of power in my life, my ministry, my testimony, my legacy.

'It is to the glory of my Father that you bear much fruit, and show yourselves to be my disciples.' (John 15:8)

#4

'Blessed is he who is not offended on account of me.' (Matthew 11:6)

After John the Baptist sent to Jesus and questioned whether he truly was the 'one' – and after Jesus publicly 'voted' on John and spoke highly of him – Jesus said these powerful words: **'Blessed is he who is not offended on account of me.'**

The truth is, John was offended by Christ, the same way I often allow myself to be offended by Christ. When my prayers are not answered as I would like, when I would like, etc., I can take offense – in the form of doubt, anger towards others, or waning commitment to believe and pray. John was in prison and he had called on the 'chain breaker', but his chains were only to be broken eternally. He never saw freedom again here on earth.

The clearest way to see and 'understand' Christ is to be in step with him – not to be deep in thought about him. Paul and Silas, beaten and bloody, were singing praises to God. (Acts 16) They were not offended on account of Christ, but rather were **'fellowshipping with Christ in his sufferings.'** (Phil 3:10) I am so challenged by this!

The truest message of Jesus is beyond our minds – it is revelation-based, and faith-accessed. This is God's way of releasing us into Spirit, keeping us from the limitations and assaults of fallen reason, and also keeping us humble! (Mt 6:23; Ps 36:9; 2 Cor 5:7; 2 Cor 4:18; Mt 16:16-18; 2 Jn 3:20; Rev 12:11)\

Prayer: When questions and circumstances assail me, Jesus help me to lift hands and worship in Jesus' name, by the power of your blood. Amen and amen!

#5

‘Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’ (Luke 10:20)

The disciples had seen demons submit to them, and they were rejoicing, and Jesus was rejoicing with them. But in the very heat of the moment Jesus said, ***‘Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’***

Why this ‘re-focus’? Why caution the disciples, and therefore us, to always be a measure happier about our place in heaven, than even our heavenly victories on earth?

Jesus was not taking away from the celebration – because even after this verse, Jesus *‘praises God’* for this spiritual victory of the disciples, and also says to them that they are *‘blessed’* to see these things. (vs. 21,23) Jesus rejoices with us in our spiritual victories, but wants us to be super-safe in our identity. If our spiritual ‘highs’ make us most happy, what will happen to our ‘happiness’, our ‘peace’, when we are struggling spiritually, insecure or unsure about ourselves, or not seeing fruit in our ministry?

We need to ***‘strive to enter the rest’*** of God (Heb 4:11), because we are safe there. We must live our spiritual life – and all other aspects of our life – from the base of this ‘safe place’, this sure identity, this soul and spirit that are ***‘hidden with Christ.’*** (Col 3:3) Our ‘purest’ identity is found in this, that our names (*our truest, secret names* – Rev 2:17), are written in heaven.

No one – not even you - can limit your identity to your spiritual and unspiritual ups and downs here on earth. Your truest identity is etched into the palms of the Lord (Is 49:16), and into heaven itself. (Luke 10:20)

#6

'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.'
(Jeremiah 1:5)

You are original. You are 'seen' by God. You are deep.

You are not only beautiful, you are *beyond* beautiful. God has put 'eternity' in your heart. (Eccl 3:11) My brother, my sister, you are truly amazing – whether or not you feel it, or others recognize it. You are an original stamp of God himself. (Gen 1:27) People may not honor you, but they should. People may not see your beauty, but it is there, and it will shine so brightly one day that it would blind the eyes of mortals. (Mt 22:30; 1 Jn 3:2)

God can change your world in 2 ways today. First, God can – and often does – change the circumstances around you. You cry to him, and he opens this door, closes that door, turns hearts towards you, turns danger away from you.

Secondly, God changes you, and with this change your whole world changes. Now, I'm not just talking about perspective; I'm talking about a literal change to the world around you, because you, as a new person in the mix, make many 'actions' and 'reactions' change.

God anoints you, for example, so that when you speak the Holy Spirit falls on those who listen. (Acts 10:44) The anointing on you affects their relationship with God. Moses saw God's glory, and so the people who saw Moses saw the reflection of God's glory and this directly impacted

their reality and path. (Ex 33:18; Ex 34) A change of God in you, changes the whole reality of life around you, and the history of mankind.

Samuel told Saul that God would change him. (1 Sam 10:6), and then we're told, '**God changed Saul's heart.**' (vs 9) This changed everything about Saul's perspective on life, his power, and his impact on the lives of others around him. The whole world changed because of his personal change, and we are still affected by his life today.

You are an original. God wants to change your world

- inside and out. Let God speak to your heart today, and move through you by his Spirit, and literally break open new paths under your feet.

'See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.' (Isaiah 43:19)

#7

'... whoever comes to me, I will never turn away.' (John 6:37)

This verse is so compassionate. Everyone who comes to Jesus, he receives. *Everyone!*

Do you receive everyone who draws close to you? This is the picture of open arms, of an open door. (Jn 10:9) Jesus is a 'way' that you can go, that every man throughout history could 'find' and 'go'. (Acts 17:27) Even today, any neighbor, friend or foe can call on the name of the Lord and be saved. (Rm 10:9)

So if Jesus is so compassionate, and all can come to him, and if the door is 'open' to everyone who lifts their eyes, lifts their voice, why are all not in? If Jesus is not only 'open' to all, but in active pursuit of the 'lost' (Luke 19:10), why are all not in? What is going on? How does this work? Why does it *not* work?

Let me add to this tough question, another: If God is so in love with all, and ready to 'heal' broken hearts, why does he let them break in the first place? If he is everywhere, well, why was he not 'there' to stop that terrible moment in my life, in your life? These are real questions that people ask. In fact, this latter question, one man recently asked me in anger, when I offered him a leaflet about Jesus.

Even with 66 books of the Bible, and the life and words of Jesus Christ, we do not have 'set' answers to these big, deep questions. We do not have 'understanding' about them, other than,

perhaps, stirrings of the Spirit, ***‘inexpressible revelations’***. (2 Cor 12:4; Rm 8:26)

Jesus himself would stand in the moment and weep. (Jn 11:35; Luke 19:41) We are called to weep. (Rm 12:15) Understanding and answers to and through the mind regarding justice and suffering, should break us down. We should never be comfortable with these enormous, God domains.

What we do know is this: Jesus – God himself – stooped to walk in the same pain we walk. Here he spilt his own blood, which carries our names in it. (Rev 5:9; Is 49:16; Heb 12:24) His message is that this blood heals hurt, cleanses sin, and sets people free. (Acts 13:39)

This is the message we know is true because we have believed, and his Spirit has poured through us. (Rm 5:5; 8:16; Eph 1:14) We can't explain all the pain, nor God's presence or justice. But we believe, we have experienced, and we testify to others with humility.

'In humility consider others better than yourself.' (Philippians 2:3)

There is something very 'human' about this verse, childlike, pure. It calls us to lift others 'higher' than ourselves. This is not simply treating others 'equally' or even 'elevating' people to *your* status. This is using your footing, your status, to lift others *higher* than you are, considering them ***'better'*** than yourself.

We often 'level the playing field', saying things like, *'Everybody is equal!'* or *'Nobody is better than anybody else!'* etc. And there is a time to fight for 'equality'. But then there is a time – a Christ-like time – to consider yourself less than others, and to serve them.

Jesus modeled this for us in 2 key ways: First, Jesus emptied himself of his glory and became one of us. It says in Philippians that in becoming a 'man' he became ***'nothing'***. It is one thing to 'stoop' and minister to the lowly; it is another thing to *become* lowly, one of those that you minister to, one of those that you reach 'down' to. This is the picture of Jesus as a man. (Phil 2:6-7)

Secondly, Jesus actually lowered himself even further to 'serve' us. He knelt before us and washed our feet. (Jn 13:1-17; Mt 23:11) He told us directly that if he, a ***'Master and Lord'*** could stoop to serve in this humble way, how much more should we serve one another. By God washing the feet of man, there is no man that cannot wash the feet of another man. The only

hierarchy that God allows us to create amongst ourselves as humans, is that of putting others on a rung higher than our own. The only way is up – for others! The only way is down – for myself! This is challenging! This is freeing! Yes, doubt your own status and consider others ‘better’ than yourself! What a fragrance of true humility will fill the land!

(Rm 12:10; Jn 3:30)

#9 The Lonely Road

I was on a bus, traveling with colleagues for a day away from work... and as I gazed down a sunny side road, speeding past, my mind and heart were hiding in Christ. I was whispering his name, and holding to him deep in my heart. It dawned on me suddenly, that this 'hiding' in Christ, this holding him like a secret friend, an ever-present comfort, is not something to be ashamed of. It is the very essence of Christ's truth and Christ's promise to us. He came to seek and save the lost – which is every one of us. (Lk 19:10) Whether we know it or not, or feel it or don't feel it, Jesus knows this is 'what' we are, and it is 'where' he finds us.

Does he want us to feel lost? No, but when we *do* feel the pangs of being lost, how deeply we value being found! Jesus likened this also to being forgiven, and knowing our sin. Does he want us to feel the weight of sin and guilt? No. But when we do feel the pangs of our sin – the 'sting of death' – we love Christ much! (Lk 7:47)

The truth is, my brothers, this life has been shot through with an arrow of death, and we are born reeling. Our life is short, fast, dark and hard. This is true. But thanks to Jesus, there is a 'truer' truth – the story of life conquering this death. Stop and meditate on this for a minute. The story, the 'report' of healing and safety is the '*truer*' report, the strong Spirit, the last word.

The story of eternal life eclipsing mortal life is the '*end story*', the more 'real' reality. If you feel that Jesus is like a treasure in a field that you have found, and others do not see, this is because he is! (*Read Matthew 13:44*)

#10 Pray

Jesus saw the need and **'prayed to the Lord of the harvest.'** (Mt 9:38) Do you ever feel a pressure to share your faith with friends, family, co-workers...? This is a God-given pressure! However, the enemy moves very swiftly here to plant seeds of fear in our minds, heaviness in our heart, discouragement in our soul. How does he do this? I believe the enemy tries to make it *our* fight, *our* battle, *our* 'to-do' list. This is a cunning twist on a spiritual 'responsibility'. You see, this particular 'call to share' is one we do not do 'for' God, but one we do 'with' God.

Jesus had a heart of compassion for the lost. (Mt 9:36) He wept for them. (Lk 19:42) But we learn from the Lord in this: When Jesus saw the lost and 'felt' for them, he did not rush to work, or even admonish his disciples to rush to work. Instead, Jesus turned to his disciples and said, **'Therefore, pray...'** (Mt 9:38)

Jesus was kept in perfect peace, even when he was 'on mission' (Is 26:9), or surrounded by need. And remember, Jesus did not even touch or reach all those around him at every moment. (cf. John 5:1-7)

So how did Jesus know such peace in his call to evangelize? He had 2 key things at work in his heart, mind and mission field all the time:

1) He only said and did what the Father said and did. (John 5:19) Jesus was led by the Spirit, in step with the Spirit. (Gal 5:25) So Jesus did not react to the need he saw, rather he acted on what the Father was doing. And the Lord 'grants sleep

to those he loves.’ (Ps 127:2) The Lord also gave Jesus down time, sign-off time, places of solitude to rest and pray and be restored.

2) Jesus believed that God was drawing people to him, not just that he had to go find people. Yes, we are told – and should be excited at the possibilities of – seeking out the lost. (Lk 19:10) But another wind of the spiritual force at work is God *bringing* the lost to you.

Jesus told the Pharisees that all those the Father gives him, come to him, and all those that come Jesus would not turn away. (Jn 6:37) In fact, Jesus says that unless the Father draws someone to him, he/she cannot come. (Jn 6:44) Jesus was at peace about this. So much so that he could look the Pharisees in the eye and say that the reason they did not ‘come’ to Jesus was because their Father was the devil. (Jn 8:44)

Jesus did not ‘take on’ the pressure of convincing people. He ‘testified’ to truth, and walked where God led him. He loved people, but would not follow them when they would not follow him. (Mk 10:17-23) Jesus was at peace in his reach!

I’ve entitled this entry ‘Pray’. The reason is, I feel one key in knowing God’s peace in reaching others, is not to ‘rush’ to work, but to ***‘pray to the Lord of the harvest.’*** (Mt 9:38)

Are you praying for people? This will also help you discern who Jesus is bringing to you for more testimony about him.

#11 *'This session is over!'*

I was at a teaching conference recently, and when the morning session was finished, the presenter said, *'This session is over!'*

Honestly, I did not lament this fact, but I did ponder the definitive declaration. In this life things start and stop. They end. I'm thrilled that all things negative and evil have an end, that even evil itself has 'had' an end. (John 16:11; 19:30; Psalm 22:31) But good things also end.

This is one of the tragic consequences of our sinful, fallen life. We all know that our lives end (we die!), but everything good in life also ends. So *all* things end – good and bad - and that depresses me! (This is very 'Ecclesiastes'!) This makes me sad! Even when I was a kid, I 'felt' a good day end, I 'felt' a good time end, a good meal, a good toy, a good game, a good movie, a good sunset, a good sunrise...

Listen, there will come a day when the 'good' will never end. This is our destiny, and we are told that with each passing day, the light of this destiny grows stronger. Yes, ***'The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter until the full light of day.'*** (Pr 4:18)

I would encourage you to try to take note of some of the descriptions of 'heaven' that are in the Bible – look them up and write them down. My favorite are in Revelation 21:1-5 and Revelation 22:1-5.

We need to ponder this future often. We are told that Jesus, ***'for the joy set before him endured***

the cross... (Heb 12:2) We need to set our eyes on this joy, this 'heaven' set before us. (2 Cor 4:18) Paul did. (Phil 3:12-14) Peter did. (1 Pe 1:4) We are told that even now we are ***'hidden with Christ'*** (Col 3:3), and we need to soak in this. This reality of 'heaven' needs to become more in our 'reality', our focus, our investments.

I encourage you this day to find a quiet place, a quiet few minutes, maybe make a cup of coffee, turn on a lamp, turn off your phone, and sit in the presence of the Lord. Think on the river that runs even now through the city of heaven. (Rev 21:1-5) Listen to the waters of God's voice. (Ps 42:7)

#12

'Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?'

(2 Kings 2:14)

Jesus was mocked. His whole life he was misunderstood. His meekness was misunderstood for weakness; his trust and his accessibility, for stupidity. But Jesus never stopped loving, laughing, and allowing the lowest of society to have direct access to him. He did not consider equality with God something to be **'grasped'**. (Phil 2:6)

Here on earth I weary myself 'grasping' at my rights, at people's respect, at my rank, my status, my position – socially, occupationally, spiritually. In fact, I expend so much energy on holding on to myself, that I lack energy to love God and love others – the 2 most important commands. (Mt 22:36-40) Oh, to live free of this pursuit of self, and to blow free in the Spirit of Jesus! (Jn 3:8)

When Paul met with his weaknesses, really felt them like a tearing thorn in his flesh, at first he asked God to take this weakness from him. Note: It is OK to ask Jesus to take these thorns from us! But when Paul saw clearly that these particular weaknesses – or insecurities – were purposed for *more* of Christ's glory to get through, Paul began to **'boast in his weaknesses.'** (II Cor 12:9-10)

There is a part of our weakness – like Christ's weakness – that lets God through to our souls and to others. This weakness lets God blow through and cleanse and refresh our minds. Just trust that God, in his 'pruning', is establishing the 'best' you, the 'strongest' you, through humility

and by his Spirit. (Jn 15:2; Rm 12:1- 2)

Remember, it is not by might (*or experience, honor, accomplishment*), nor by power, but by his Spirit that we have victory in all that we are, and all that we say, and all that we do.

'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty.' (Zechariah 4:6)

#13 Break Free!

Listen, the report on who you are is God's. Not your parents', not yours, not your past's.

Today I thought of a 'memory morgue', and had an image and feeling of just breaking through walls of faces, spaces, memories, fears, insecurities... just breaking out, and being who God says I am, who I actually *know* I am.

Yes, you know God's voice, and you know your passions for him, your giftings, and your footing. *You really do!* It is fear of people and the past and the questions that hold you in a 'name' that is really not your true name. Look up these verses. Memorize them. Claim them, by the blood of Jesus, and soar!

2 Cor 5:17

1 Cor 4:3-4

Rev 2:17

Gal 2:20

I want to add that the 'power' to break into the true you is God's grace. Yes, this mysterious, reason-defying truth and spirit that is 'grace', is your 'footing' for freedom.

What is God's grace? How do we access it? Well, by faith we just do! We receive God's 'report' about who we are, and step into it. We don't look for a justification to 'be' who we are; rather, we just accept who we are, say 'Yes!' to God, and step in through the door of Jesus Christ. (Jn 10:9)

Grace is what gives you access to God's truth about you, despite everything you think, feel and

have done. Grace is God's floor for the 'new you', the 'true you'. You stand on, and in this grace, by faith. Close your eyes, say 'Yes, Jesus!', and receive.

'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' II Corinthians 12:9

'Agree with God and be at peace.'

(Job 22:21)

#14 This and not that!

There are times when the Lord will speak to you, will prompt your heart directly. It will not come with understanding or insight, but with a clear sense of this way and not that way, yes to this, no to that!

Jesus said, ***'My sheep know my voice.'*** (Jn 10:27) We do. When we believed, God deposited his Spirit in us, and this same Spirit not only speaks to us, and through us, but prays to the Father for us. (Eph 1:14; Jn 14:26; Lk 21:14-15; Rm 8:26).

The closer a sheep is to the Shepherd, the more clearly it knows his voice, the more often it hears his voice. We can know God more. (James 4:7) We can love God more. (Mt 22:36-40) We can see more clearly than we did before. (Mt 6:23) And the closer we are to Jesus, the sharper our perception will be of his direction, his guidance.

Do you aspire to know God better? Do you 'lean in', like the Canaanite woman, like Martha, like Jacob? (*Gen 32:22-32; Mt 15:21-28; Jn 20:11-19*)

Sit in silence with the Lord a little longer. (Ps 46:10) Ponder a verse for a little longer. (Ps 1:2) In prayer, ask God to get a little closer and deeper to him. (James 4:2-3)

Be close to God's people. Spend time with others of faith. (Heb 10:25) Ask their advice. (Pr 15:22) We are admonished to do this throughout Scripture, and we see this example set for us by the apostles themselves. (Gal 2:1-2; Acts 15:40) As you draw near to God, and God's people, you

will begin to discern God's voice more clearly. And you will see confirmation of this as you grow. Take note of it, when you do see God confirm his words and promptings to you. Thank him for this (Lk 17:17-18), and 'note it' so that you continue to discern correctly. (Phil 1:9; Rm 12:1-2)

#15 FAITH FREEDOM

Such a mystery, really! We are told in Hebrews 11:1 that ***'faith is being certain of what we hope for...'***

Knowing and hoping: In this verse faith would seem like a type of 'knowing' something that we are 'hoping for' – but 'hoping' seems to be an uncertain type of 'knowing'?

And when we get too confident about 'knowing' what it is we hope for, we are sobered by Paul, who writes, ***'who hopes for what he already has?'*** (Rm 8:24)

The nature of our ***'being certain of what we hope for'*** is also imbued with *not* yet knowing – or being certain – of what lay ahead. John writes, ***'... what we will be has not yet been made known...'*** (1 Jn 3:2), and Paul also say, ***'Now I know in part...'*** (1 Cor 13:12)

One aspect of faith that I want to focus on here might appear opposite to knowing; it is actually the freedom that faith gives to *not* know with our minds, but to know with our hearts.

Faith is a key to standing firm where there is no visible – or earthly – ground beneath our feet. Faith gives us a 'Yes!' and 'It is!' where every fact and figure proves a 'No!' Hebrews 11:3 says, ***'By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.'***

There is a foundation we stand on that is indeed a rock, but not that of this world. It is Christ as a cornerstone. (Eph 2:20)

With this foundation under ourselves, our souls, we build our lives. With Christ as a foundation we do not build just 'Christian lives' or good-living, we actually *are* '**living stones**', the same way Christ our foundational stone is 'living'. (1 Pe 2:5)

Faith is our door to all things 'free' and true in Christ Jesus – and this includes our very own selves. Yes, the truest you is not in what you work for, earn, understand, define... The truest you is who Christ says you are.

Christ's report is 'truth'. To access this, and walk in it, build on it... you need that humble and powerful 'tool' that is unseen, indefinable, solid as a rock: **faith**.

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

#16 VISION

'Without a vision the people perish...'

(Proverbs 29:18)

Moses used his last 'look', to look ahead.

He was in his last hours and God showed him the 'promised land'. (Deuteronomy 34) At this time – end of his life – Moses was not focusing on what he had done, his road walked, his legacy, his portfolio... he was focusing on what lay ahead for others, and for himself in the next life.

Now remember, ***'God is spirit.'*** (John 4:24) The issue of 'vision', like any issue of the Lord, is 'spirit'. It is not about looking forward or looking back, it is about looking towards truth, looking towards God.

Lot's wife looked back and was turned to a pillar of salt, not because she 'turned around', but because she disobeyed God and was setting her sights, so to speak, on a life of sin instead of a life of new beginnings in the Lord. (Gen 19)

David turned, 'looked behind', and counted his troops. It was not the 'counting' or quantifying the prosperity and power that the Lord had amassed in his kingdom that was the problem; it was that his heart in this moment 'counted' on itself, its own possessions and troops, rather than on the Lord. (1 Chron 21:1). We are admonished in the Psalms to 'count' the citadels of Jerusalem. (Ps 48:12) Counting is not the problem, just like money is never the problem. The 'heart' is the problem.

We need to walk in a spirit of childlike delight, and enjoy the good gifts that God gives. I feel there is nothing that brings God more joy than to see his children enjoy the good gifts he gives – because this takes faith, humility, and is actually the main reason God created life! (*Mt 18:3; James 1:17; 1 Tim 4:4-5*)

Also, however, as a redeemed people, knowing the brokenness of this life and glory to come, we absolutely must, like Moses, gaze into heaven. This will pull us through. Jesus himself weathered his suffering and calling by setting his eyes on the **'joy to come'**. Paul also 'strained' ahead. (Philippians 3:13)

'...Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...' (Hebrews 12:2)

(Of Abraham) **'For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.'** (Hebrews 11:10)

#17 God Welcomes All!

One verse I love is from 2 Peter, where it states, **'The Lord... does not want any to perish...'** (2 Pe 3:9)

This is a key verse! We must all embrace it, and never compromise on this truth no matter what theologies or philosophies we come to adopt. Like all 'truths', we must take them captive and make them subject to Christ (2 Cor 10:3-5), and we must be tenacious about **'hollow philosophies'** that take us captive. (Co 2:8) We must believe, and firmly hold to God's heart of love for every single human being throughout all history!

Here is another truth of God's that we must also hold very firm, because it is clear in the teaching of the Bible, and the teaching of Jesus: God's heart of love for people does not mean he allows people any lifestyle or belief that they want.

God loves all, but he does let us walk away from him. He pursues us with his truth, but does not compromise the gospel in order to reach us – because the gospel is Christ!

I often think of the rich young ruler, and how Jesus **'looked at him and loved him'** (Mk 10:21), but Jesus *did* let him leave when he refused to bend to the word and teaching of Jesus.

Christ *is* the message of Christ. To alienate oneself from Christ, his Spirit, his Word - which is **'spirit and life'** (John 6:63) – is to alienate oneself not from this theology or that denomination; it is to alienate oneself from

'Christ'. Christianity is nothing. Christ did not come to establish Christianity. Christ came that every individual might 'know God'.

Each life needs to embrace Jesus, by his Spirit, as a friend, and walk with him. (Gal 5:25; Jn 15:15) And this 'personal relationship' with Jesus Christ – i.e. his main reason in coming to earth - needs to frame our discussion about and with every 'prodigal', and about and with every 'theology' and 'denomination' and difficult passage of the Bible.

'... and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means God with us.' (Matthew 1:23)

'It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh counts for nothing. The words that I have spoken are spirit and life.' (John 6:63)

#18 Your Spiritual Gift – Your True Self

'Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.'
(1 Peter 4:10-12)

Identity in life is a deep, deep issue. At a young age I become conscious of being a unique individual, but also being one of a very big crowd – the human race. So for the rest of life I jostle and struggle to 'find myself', to figure out who I – just me – really am. Can you relate to this? This struggle is truly part of 'being', and is traced through people's lives in history, in Scripture, and in your own heart today.

I believe the verses above (1 Peter 4:10-12) give us key insight to a 'path of freedom' in knowing and being our true self, in two ways:

Your true self is **from** God: Now it is important to know that the 'truest' you is the one that comes from Christ's report over your life, the name he gives you. You will remember, he was always giving people new names, and also promises you one! (*Simon to Peter, Saul to Paul*)¹

In this scripture Peter tells us that our spiritual gift

¹ Matthew 16:18; Revelation 2:17

– that which defines our truest self - is **‘God’s grace’** and that we **‘steward’** it. So you can **‘be you’** – i.e. in your true gift and call – in glorious and confident fashion, because in doing so you are stewarding God’s grace as he would want you to (*‘... speak as one speaking the very words of God.’ vs.11*).

It honors God to really lay claim to what he offers you. Any other way of ‘receiving’ from God – *tentatively, sheepishly, insecurely* – does not honor him, and reflects a heart of doubt, fear and pride.² When you see and know God’s gift to you – i.e. your truest self – you will hear and wrestle with doubts from within (1 Jn 3:20), haters from without (Rev 12:10), and the envious that cut across your path and even try to ‘change’ your path. (Acts 17:5; Pr 27:4; Mt 26:6-15)

So to sum up point one here: your true self is a gift from God – and is of essence **‘God’s grace’** – and you need to ‘receive’ it graciously, confidently, with faith. Receive your ‘self’ from God!

Being your true self is **for** God: In this passage (1 Peter 4:10-12), God gives us a ‘reason’ for *‘being true’*. We are told that in stewarding our gift, in being confident in our role, **‘God may be praised through Jesus Christ.’** (vs.12)

At different times in my life I personally have experienced a resistance from certain people when I am operating in the fullness of my gifting. The reason for this is exactly the same as the

² Luke 19:11-27; 2 Kings 13:15-19; Hebrews 11:6

reason for my resisting others when they are operating in the fullness of their gift! You see, when you are operating in your gifting, in faith, you do so with authority (Mt 7:29; 1 Pe 4:12), and with skill (Acts 6:10). This incites envy in people! Judas eventually cracked under envy. (Mt 26:6-15) I've seen it in others and I've seen it in me. I think we know by instinct that to really take hold of Jesus in us (our gifting and identity), we will, in fact, be more like Jesus, more confident and effective... and have more to battle, as Jesus did!

But here I want to encourage you with 'freedom', and inspire you with 'adventure'. Ponder this point: To lay claim to your gift and your 'name', although it may ruffle some feathers and take a lot of faith to hold on to, by really doing it ***'God is praised through Jesus Christ'***.

So even if you do not do it for yourself, or for others, do it as unto the Lord and you will see God praised! Let's sum up point two here: Your true self is not only a gift 'from' God, but it is 'for' God. Claim it and run with it, because this brings 'praise' to God through Jesus Christ.

#19 Anointing

I'm going to end this devotional with this reflection. Yesterday I felt the Lord 'released' my vision to capture this truth, which I believe is a fresh wind of freedom. *Lord, open our eyes to really see and know your light, and walk in more freedom!*

God has a special name for you (Rev 2:17). God brought you forth in his image (Gen 1:27), and set eternity in your heart. (Eccl 3:11) So we have a 'name', a unique stamp of God on us, and eternity in our soul. This is the real me, the real you.

Now here on earth we have also been 'created' by parents, and given a name by them. This is significant, and meaningful – particularly insofar as this 'human' story aligns with and reflects God's story. But at best, even with great, Christian parents, your 'human' story will be but a dim reflection of God's work and will in your life, his purpose and path set out before you.

We so often reference our human story, in order to 'know our self' and to know our 'authority' spiritually. I remember when I was only 18 years old and was on a Christian summer campaign. I remember an older Christian than myself telling a group of us that he had been on 14 Christian campaigns, was in Bible school, and he went on to detail some other credentials and accolades that he had. This guy had very strong opinions about what the rest of should be doing in our Christian lives, and in our evangelism. He was a hard guy to be around, one never felt affirmed or good enough. I know I have been 'this guy' to others, also. Lord, forgive me!

Our achievements and experiences in life are not what give us 'gifting', 'faith' or 'anointing'.¹ God grants these things as he wills, and no one – not even we ourselves – can fathom or control their outworking. We can – and must – seek to know God and who we are in him, and seek to walk with him in our identity and calling. God will use things of our lives to serve his purposes through us, to equip us. But we must not think we control or determine the 'spiritual value' of our experiences in any given situation.

'He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.' (Daniel 2:21-22)

Paul speaks to this 'human identity' and 'accolades of man', when he says in Philippians 3, ***'I consider them rubbish compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'*** (vs. 8) Jesus said that his mission in coming was to ***'serve and not be served.'*** (Mt 23:11; 20:28) When Jesus suffered, he did not threaten (*a common inclination of my heart when being judged or opposed*), but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. (2 Pe 2:23)

The best place to really break free from the chains of pride – your own and that of others – is to love the judgmental person (*as C.S. Lewis said, we must not be pharisaical even to the Pharisees*).

¹ John 11:46; John 6:68-70; Matthew 16:16-18

How can we find that footing and security to love those who are seeking to take the very floor out from under our own stand? This is where we need to understand 'anointing' and our true identity in Christ. We need to really get with God on this, and feel our feet settle on the rock that is Jesus, and the particular 'name' and call that he has for each of us.

We are told that even faith is given to each of us in a particular portion (Rm 12:3), and that portion (and where it 'walks us') is all we are going to answer for. We do not have to fight every fight, or process every challenge in the faith. No, we just have to know our name, our call, our path, and walk it in humility, in faith, in love. This is very freeing!

There is an anointing on your life. When you suit up in your anointing, you will walk in a meaningful way in every space and place the Lord leads you. You will always be 'someone' (*not that you need to have full clarity on that 'someone' every moment of every day*), and you will always be 'anointed' and with 'authority' in your call. Know your call, your mission, and walk!

Jesus did not panic about people not listening to him. He did not stress about people not recognizing him, or even saying that his goodness was evil. (John 10:20) Jesus walked this humble walk because he had his eyes on the Lord, ears open to the Lord, and did only what God the Father did. (John 5:19) This is a key for us all!

When Peter tried to reference his calling with that of John's, Jesus said to him, **'What does it matter to you? You must follow me!'** (John

21:21) So we need to know *our* call in Jesus.

What measure of faith has he given you? What spiritual gifts and communities has he given you? Walk in that way **'as unto the Lord'**, and with the authority that the Lord gives. (1 Pe 4:10; Matthew 7:29)

Lastly, remember this: Your gifting and your measure of faith, are held in place in you, *by Jesus*. This is your anointing. It is something God has decreed over your life. You might not 'feel' it all the time, but it just 'is'! (Ex 3:14) So if God says to you, *'Here!'* or *'This word!'* or *'This job!'* – know that you are 'qualified' and 'blessed' in this place. His grace is sufficient for you, wherever it is that he has you. (2 Cor 12:9-10)²

(End of devotional: Soar)

² Some Scriptures to read that reinforce this are: 1 Corinthians 1:27; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Judges chapter 6; Exodus chapters 3, 4 and 17; Jeremiah 1:17; Ezekiel 2:6; Psalm 56:3

Spirit Word

'My words are spirit and they are life.' (John 6:63)

I dedicate this devotional to you, the believer, who want more of Christ's living word – his Spirit Word - to you and through you. *'He must become more, and I must become less.'* (John 3:30)

Introduction:

Jesus came to make himself known. Jesus is his own message. He did not come primarily to teach us about this or that, or even about God. He came as God, to be *'with us'*, to be *'in us'*. (Is 7:14; Mt 1:23; Col 1:27)

Knowing God is a deeply spiritual reality, as ***'God is Spirit.'*** (Jn 4:24) Knowing God, and knowing Christ, is not primarily a 'mind' thing, though understanding does play a part. It is not primarily a 'heart' thing, though emotions play a part. It is a deeply spiritual 'truth', zone, experience. It is seeing Christ as one with the Father – a vision that can only come over us by a revelation of God! Knowing Christ is, so to speak, seeing the 'un-seeable', knowing the 'unknowable'.

I cannot speak to 'how' we crack open this vision, but I can tell you a sign of how we know this vision has come upon us: we worship Jesus.

Yes, like the blind man who received his sight – not only to see life with his eyes, but to see God with his heart – we fall down and worship Jesus as Lord. (Jn 9:38) We worship Jesus as did the

disciples after Jesus had walked on water, and stepped into the boat. (Mt 14:33) We worship him as he claimed we would (Mk 14:61-62/Dan 7:13), as we are told we should. (Acts 4:12/Phil 2:10) To deny Jesus this glory, this oneness with the Father, is to deny the Father. (Jn 14:9; 1 Jn 2:22)

This seeing and knowing of the true Christ, is revelation of God to the depths of your spirit. (Ps 42:7) It is only in his light that we see light. (Ps 36:9) It is only by his voice and word that our hearts are illuminated to the **'true message of the gospel'**, the 'real Christ', his 'true grace'. (2 Cor 4:6, Col 1:5-6, Mt 24:5, 2 Cor 11:14)

To see Christ in the flesh, and to see him perform miracles, was not necessarily to 'see' Christ. Many, many people witnessed him in the flesh, and saw his power, but did not believe. In fact, to see Christ and his power often ignited intense, murderous jealousy in people, and **'they went away and plotted his death.'** (Jn 11:53)

To see with our eyes is not to 'believe' with our heart. God wants our heart! He goes so far as to say that without faith it is impossible to please him. (Heb 11:6) God wants us to see with the eyes of our hearts, and believe.

God shines the light of Jesus on our hearts, and calls us to repent of sin, and put our faith in Jesus. This is a profoundly spiritual revelation – to see Jesus as Lord. This revelation is a gift from God. This vision of Christ, the Messiah, one with the Father, will never be fully grasped, understood, or explained, but can be increasingly known, enjoyed, shared and powerful.

Have you seen Christ? Do you know that he is Lord? Have you repented of your sin? Do you rise to walk with him every day? Do you pray to him, praise him, look for his presence and purposes throughout your day? Is he your treasure? Do you share him with others? Do you need more of his Spirit in and through your soul and your mind and your words? Me too!

Let's consider more of how the Spirit moved in and through Jesus, and how the Spirit can – and must – move in and through us...

#1 SPIRIT WORD

'Man cannot live on bread alone...'

(Mt 4:4; Deut 8:3)

People don't often say what they mean. They might be asking you, for example, something supposedly innocent and interested about yourself, but really their intent, their motive, is to distract you, and ultimately control you. Hopefully this is not what you encounter too often!

When Jesus was fasting in the desert, the devil came to him and tested him. The real test for Jesus was not anything specific the devil actually said; the test for Jesus was to listen only to God while the devil was talking, and respond to the devil – *not* according to the devil's questions – but according to the Father's leading.

So it is really interesting to read and consider the detail of how Jesus 'answered' the devil in this exchange. Jesus never actually took his 'cue' from the devil. When the devil quoted Scripture, or prefaced his questions with a wager, *'If you are truly the Son of God...'*, Jesus simply noted the 'spirit of the lie', and brought to bear a 'Spirit Word' – a Word of authority. (Mt 7:28)

You are named and called by God. You are his. You have nothing to prove to the world, and no argument to debate on the world's terms. You take your 'cue' only from the Father, as did Jesus throughout his whole life and ministry. (Jn 5:19)

When the world brings you a challenge, quiet your spirit in that moment, and whisper, *'Speak, Lord!'* Respond as he leads, not as your questioner

leads.

Activity: Read Matthew 4:1-11. Note the questions and 'position' of the devil, and note how Jesus responds. Jesus is never actually answering the devil directly. Also, after Jesus stays steady in being led only by the Lord with 'Spirit Word', note how the real motive and 'request' of the devil is exposed!

#2 SPIRIT WORD

'I will also ask you one question...' (Mt 21:24)

Begin by reading Mt 21:23-27. After you have done this, read on...

Often as believers we are on the defense with the world. We let the world ask the questions, and then we scramble to defend our position, to answer wisely, acceptably...

The truth is, my friends, that the 'world' – that is, the systems of darkness, and everything that opposes Christ – is actually what *trespasses* here on the earth. Jesus has all authority on earth and heaven. (Mt 28:18) Earth belongs to Christ – people and animals – and every soul belongs to him. (*Ps 24:1, Acts 17:25, Ps 50:10, Ez 18:4*)

In this passage of Scripture (Mt 21:23-27), the Pharisees come to question Jesus, to undermine his authority. What is fascinating here is that when they question Jesus, he questions them back. He puts a shrewd, solid question back to them that exposes a lot of layers – their fear of the people, their own knowledge of what the people believe about Jesus and about what has been said about him and his authority.

Jesus knew who he was, and what his calling was. He was not going to answer to the Pharisees. Now, interestingly, Jesus did not come out and say this, but rather he listened to the Lord, and brought a question to the Pharisees that put them on such shaky ground that their own confidence to question him vanished.

I remember a few years ago I was trying to grow in listening to the Holy Spirit, rather than just having lots of answers for lots of questions. And only a few days into this growth zone, a colleague at work turned and asked me in front of a number of other colleagues, what I thought about him going on a 'Zen Retreat', to a Buddhist Center in the countryside.

Normally, my mind would be racing in this situation, and honestly, quite overwhelmed. I would be scanning my mind for 'answers' regarding Buddhism, polytheism, etc. But I consciously at this moment, paused. In a split second I lifted my heart to the Lord and asked for guidance, for '*Spirit Word*'. As clear as a bell it came to and through me. I said, '*Tom, tell me what it is you're looking for on this retreat, and I'll tell you why I think you won't find it there. Are you looking for peace?*' Tom smiled, nodded, and that ended our group conversation.

Activity: Sometimes the 'Spirit Word' is quite shrewd, as with Jesus counter-questioning the Pharisees, referencing a web of local connections and relationships. Nonetheless, as with Jesus, the 'Spirit Word' that is *shrewd*, comes from the Father as quickly and clearly as the *simple* 'Spirit Word'. Sit in the Lord's presence today, and pray. Ask the Lord to pour over you more of his Spirit, and ask him to open your ears and mind and heart to his 'Spirit Word' when someone brings a question your way.

#3 SPIRIT WORD (John 18, part 1)

'Why question me...?' (John 18:21)

John chapter 18 is fascinating. When Jesus was questioned by the high priest about his teaching, he said, ***'Ask those who heard me.'*** (vs. 21)

This response was considered disrespectful and Jesus was slapped. Jesus did not stop here, he pressed in: ***'If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you hit me?'*** (vs. 24)

Jesus is not answering their questions, but exposing their hearts. They are jealous, angry, quick to violence. What he taught – he has in fact shown them - is irrelevant. They don't care. Hate is in their hearts. It would have been futile to begin a discourse on his holy teachings – that is, to actually answer their questions. Jesus saw their hearts, listened to the Father (Jn 5:19), and responded accordingly. A 'Spirit Word'!

The 'Spirit Word' here, it is important to note, as in so many circumstances with Jesus and with us, did not bring sweetness to the moment, but violence, anger, reaction. Jesus was not violent or angry – never was in spirit (Is 42:2; 53:7); but his 'Spirit Word' brought these emotions and reactions of others to the surface.

Don't judge a book by its cover, and don't judge a 'Spirit Word' by the response of the world.

#4 SPIRIT WORD (John 18, part 2)

'Is that your own idea...?' (Jn 18:34)

So Jesus has offended the high priest (see entry #3), and now is before Pilate. Pilate asks him a powerful, pertinent question. In fact, the answer to this question is Christ's own gospel, will be his condemnation, and he does chose to answer it directly at the end of the process. (Mark 14:61-62) But here and now, he deflects it, almost dismisses it:

'Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'

'Is that your own idea,' Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about me?' (Jn 18:33-34)

Pilate gets unnerved and defensive, ***'Am I a Jew? Your own people...'*** (vs. 35) Pilate drops the question, which reveals that to answer it would never have landed on his heart. His heart was not asking; his head, his pride, his fear, his fumbling... Jesus speaks to the heart, pulls and presses and exposes the heart. The heart is what concerns Jesus.

Incredibly – note this – Jesus goes on in this very exchange and says, ***'Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'*** (vs. 37) And Pilate - after being given this answer, so to speak, asks the question: ***'What is truth?'*** (vs. 38) Again, note, Jesus had just pointed Pilate to and through the door of truth – himself - with the previous statement, and then Pilate, as if nothing had been said, asks the deep question, ***'What is truth?'*** (vs. 38) Was Pilate really seeking truth? The

answer had just been laid out before him? (vs. 37)

The answer – Truth itself – was about to be crucified by him. Jesus speaks to the real questions of the heart with Spirit Words; he doesn't simply speak to 'questions' we might ask – and others ask – because we don't often know what it is we're asking, what it is we're seeking, what it is we're actually doing to truth.

#5 SPIRIT WORD (Herod part 1)

'Go tell that fox...' (Lk 13:32)

Begin by reading these 4 verses, Luke 13:31-33. After you have done this, read on.

This moment is multi-layered. Pharisees come to tell Jesus that Herod is after him. But the truth is, the Pharisees were always after Jesus. Jesus manages to send everyone into a panic here. First, he tells them to tell Herod that he won't leave, but he does it in 'royal' fashion – excuse the pun! He tells them to **'tell that fox...'**

They wouldn't dare carry that message back to Herod! Truth is, however, it wasn't about Herod. They – the Pharisees - wanted Jesus gone! Jesus exposes them in this. They say, '*Herod...*', and he says then go tell Herod...

Then Jesus speaks prophetically in this moment, in this opportunity, saying he is going to heal and work this day and the next day and that on the third day he'll hit his goal! (vs. 32b)

Here he deposits with these Pharisees a strange word regarding days 1-2-3, and leaves them to ponder. He also then adds a very direct hit, saying that prophets had to die in Jerusalem; in other words, he is a prophet, and these Pharisees were part of the murderous movement against prophets.

People bring 'points' to Jesus, about Jesus, and under the guise of this or that motive. Jesus listens to the Father (Jn 5:19), and speaks to the heart.

Activity: Spend a quiet moment with Jesus in prayer. Enjoy his meek presence, his friendship. (Jn 15:15; Phil 2:5-8) Given his power and 'straight-talking' nature, it is incredible, comforting, that he stands with you, sits with you, whispers to you as a best and closest friend. Just enjoy that for a while. Feel his smile! (Zeph 3:17)

#6 SPIRIT WORD (Herod part 2)

‘Jesus would not answer him...’ (Luke 23:9)

So now Jesus stands before Herod. If you see the previous entry, #5, you will see that Jesus had spoken strong words about Herod, and indeed, Herod had beheaded Jesus’ friend and cousin, John the Baptist.

We are told that Herod was ‘pleased’ to see Jesus, and that he had wanted to for a long time. However, we are also told what curiosity was really driving Herod, ***‘...he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort.’*** (vs. 8)

So Herod ‘plied’ Jesus with questions, but Jesus would not answer. Herod was not interested in the words of Jesus, but wanted to see wonders. And these wonders were for his own gratification, not so as to really see and know that Jesus was the Son of God. So Jesus showed him no wonders, and spoke no words. The true ‘Spirit Word’ here was Jesus himself, the ‘Word made flesh’. (Jn 1:14) His presence was the Word of God, not anything spoken from his mouth. And again we see a powerful reaction – and exposure of the heart of man – when Jesus remained silent per the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Herod shows himself violent:

‘Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him.’

(vs. 11)

Sometimes the Spirit-filled Word, is no word at all.
And the true heart of man here shows itself.

#7 SPIRIT WORD (Offended Pharisees)

'Let them alone!' (Mt 15:14)

There is a time for everything. (Eccl 3:1) There is a time to make peace – and we are told to be peace-makers (Rm 12:18), and also that the wisdom that comes down from heaven is peace-making. (James 3:17)

However, the peace that Jesus gives is **'not as the world gives it.'** (Jn 14:27) And the peace of Jesus sometimes comes like a sword, as does his Word, dividing joints and marrow, spirit and soul. (Heb 4:12)

Remember that Jesus also said, **'I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother...'** (Mt 10:34-35/Micah 7:6)

Does this nullify or contradict the very mission and spirit of Christ in **'turning hearts of children back to their fathers'**? (Mal 4:6) No! But it is critical to note that the peace that Jesus brings – and the peace he ministered daily – is one that brings a pure Word of the Father, a pure Spirit of Truth. And this often is the same as bringing a battle, or stirring a conflict. Why? Because the peace of Jesus is not pure? No! But rather because his peace is so pure that our world reviles and writhes against it.

The conflict that comes with true 'Spirit Word' of Christ, is because, if needed, he will be proven true and every man a liar. (Rm 3:4) When we are being exposed as liars, we strike out like cornered rats. We bring the conflict, where Christ brings

true peace, exposing our sin.

Activity: Ask Jesus today to make you strong! To help you know true peace that comes from his Spirit, even if it means you must bring a strong 'Spirit Word', or resist appeasing the offended. Read this passage where Jesus had offended the Pharisees, his disciples were not liking it, and Jesus said, '**Let them alone!**' (Mt 15:1-14)

Note: It is interesting that this argument with the Pharisees, and their offense, came from Jesus challenging their 'traditions' being put in front of their true faith, and their religion before their love of God. This issue is as current now in our own lives, as it was then! (Mt 22:36-40/Rev 2:1-5)

#8 SPIRIT WORD (Politics/Taxes)

‘... and give to God what is God’s.’ (Mt 22:21)

This famous passage about paying taxes to Caesar is a mind-blower! How many petty and fruitless conversations have you found yourself in where Christianity meets Politics? Me, too!

So here Jesus is brought a question about politics and power, and the very motive is to trap him, get him in trouble with the authorities. Again, pause for a minute. How many conversations and comments about politics and Christianity that come *your way*, might also have a disingenuous motive? Maybe to get you off true testimony to Christ, and into debate and arguments? Maybe to try to profile you as bigoted or judgmental? So how did Jesus deal with this question, this test?

Very simply he disarmed it, put it in perspective, and called everyone present to consider their relationship with God. In one or two lines – Spirit-filled – Jesus elevated this issue to a higher level, a Spirit sphere, and brought everyone back to the question of the gospel.

Activity: Look up and read this short exchange Jesus had with the Pharisees and the Government: Matthew 22:15-22

Note: Jesus didn’t really speak to taxes on this matter. He noted that man’s face is on money, but God’s face is on man - God has made man in his own image! (Gen 1:27) Give Caesar his money, and let Caesar give God his soul.

#9 SPIRIT WORD

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...'

(Luke 4:18)

Jesus is given the Scriptures to read. He opens Isaiah 61:1, reads it (***'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...'***), and then claims it for himself! (vs. 21) This is a powerful, stirring, dangerous moment! What happens? Well, we're then told, ***'All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.'*** (vs. 22) But then...

Jesus starts speaking to the people directly, pointing out that in Scripture the prophets were at times sent not to their own people (the listeners), but to others – e.g. Elijah and the widow of Sidon, Elisha and the Syrian, Naaman. (vs. 23-27) Jesus points out that a prophet – i.e. himself – is never accepted in his home town. (vs. 24) What happens then? Well, this 'Spirit Word' brought by Christ made the people ***'furious'***! (vs. 28) Now they drive him out of the town to a cliff with the purpose of throwing him off! (vs. 29)

From favor (vs. 22) to murderous threats (vs. 29), the 'Spirit Word' of the Lord will go forth, touch hearts, win people, and expose people.

Activity: Think a little about how you determine whether a 'Word' or action is truly Spirit-filled, honoring to God.

#10 SPIRIT SONG

'If two of you on earth agree...' (Mt 18:19)

We sing in church on Sunday morning. We all lift our worship to the Lord Jesus. Here we rise above our thoughts, our doctrinal differences and different ways of understanding God, seeing God, judging situations and people and circumstances. The eyes of all of our hearts look on the One Savior, and we hail his majesty in song. This is powerfully spiritual! How can we 'connect' here, and yet differ on so many other little things?

We all see Christ in and by Christ's own light. ***'In your light we see light!'*** (Ps 36:9) We see him because we are 'shown' him. (2 Cor 4:6) So the 'revelation' of Jesus is the one pure thing we all see and know, and all see and know in the same way. His light pours forth over our hearts and we are all caught up in that same Light – ***'The true light that gives light to all mankind...'*** (Jn 1:9)

If we can center ourselves on what we all see in the same way – Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord – and try to do more of life and mission and purpose on this cornerstone alone, I believe we would find more unity, and more direction in the 'micro'. And I do say, 'micro', because lifting Jesus high, and taking up our cross every day, is the only 'macro' issue there is on this earth.

If when we come together we put time, energy and heart in ***'lifting Christ up'*** (Jn 12:32), this will calibrate our vision for other steps, and stepping together.

#11 SPIRIT WORD (Quiet Facts)

'The king was enraged...' (Mt 22:7)

Jesus did not raise his voice in the streets. (Is 42:2) This is 'spirit truth'. We know that Jesus was very strong and very straight at times, and it would seem in these moments his voice may have been 'raised' – such as his turning of tables in the temples, and his powerful, confrontational speech to the Pharisees in Matthew 23.

But one thing that has caught my attention recently was how Jesus, even in the child-like genre of the parable, would calmly say things that were in essence terrifying.

For example, in this parable of the 'Wedding Banquet', we are told that after generous, even long- suffering invitations of the king, the king became '***enraged***', sent an army to destroy the invitees and burn their city. Just like that. We then move on to the next group of invitees. But if you stop for a moment and consider...

This parable speaks of God inviting us to heaven. It is clear as day. God, for the honor of his son, Jesus Christ (who is telling the story), invites us to a banquet, a party. He even implores us when we first refuse him. (see vs. 3-4) Here we see that he is gentle, long-suffering, not easily offended. (Pr 29:11; Mt 12:32) But then we are told that all our rejection of God, our refusal to come and receive the Son, will, one 'final' day, result in a type of '***eternal destruction.***' (vs. 7)

The 'Spirit Word' – the true, strong word of God's love and justice – is laced calmly through every

word of Christ. Jesus does not omit details of justice in the context of the story of his love, of his party, his banquet.

I have often left out the 'repentance' angle of the gospel, when sharing about Christ's love and acceptance. Recently, listening to an evangelist preach, I was reminded of this key, loving, gospel-centered requirement of Christ – repentance.

Come to Christ, yes! But come with a heart that turns away from your sin! Repent! This is where chains break and people walk free – not only into forgiveness and salvation, but away from darkness and pain.

#12 SPIRIT WORD (Secret Mission)

'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.' (Jn 4:32)

Pause and consider this line! Jesus is saying to his disciples – not to the 'world' – that he has a source of nourishment (energy in, not energy out), that is not known to them. But these are his disciples! They know his mission, right?

This one line, one wind of God's Spirit, still blows to and through us 2000 years later! This is 'Spirit Word'. Jesus goes on to tell us that this 'nourishment', this 'food', this 'energy in', *is* in fact, energy out!

'My food... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.' (vs. 34)

Do you have a job to do for Christ? Has he gifted you to serve the church in a special way? Are you invested in this work?¹ Is it so special to you, a source of nourishment to your life purpose, that people near and dear to you *'know nothing about it'*?

'Your love, oh Lord, is better than life!'
(Psalm 63:3)

¹ 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 12:7

#13 SPIRIT WORD (Our Driving Force – part 1)

'Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evildoers?' (Ps 94:16)

We call Jesus, 'Light', and rightly so! (Jn 1:4,9; 8:12) But one does not walk long with Christ before he begins to mold us into his own self. We call him, 'Light', but then he calls us, ***'light of the world'***. (Mt 5:14)

His hands sustain us! (Heb 1:3) But then he calls us *his* hands and feet. (1 Cor 12:27) We see Christ coming to us, standing apart from us. But then he *indwells* us – ***'Christ in you, the hope of glory!'*** (Col 1:27)

He wills that we become one with him, that we see him and become like him. (1 Jn 3:2)

One driving force behind our 'Spirit Words' and 'Spirit Work' is to stand against evil. I love today's verse, Psalm 94:16, and other calls and admonishments of Christ to stand and fight – e.g. Micah 6:8.

There is a deep and wide reserve of God's favor and power and protection, for the valiant, for the brave, for the strong! There just is. We read it from Genesis to Revelation. We cannot and should not try to be heroes in our own strength (Zech 4:6; Ps 20:7), but if walking with Christ, full of the Holy Spirit, you are brought between good and evil, stand against evil! Stand!

'Who will rise up for me...?' (Ps 94:16)

If you stand up for Christ against abuse, violence, pornography, prostitution, abduction, human trafficking, brawling... Jesus will be honored, will blow winds of power, will favor you!

#14 SPIRIT WORD (Our Driving Force – part 2)

‘Jesus was moved with compassion...’

(Mt 9:36)

We can be – and should be – moved to action and ‘Spirit Word’ by the evil that trespasses here. *(Remember, darkness is not legal here, but a trespasser. ‘All authority’ now belongs to Christ! Mt 28:18, Ps 24:1, Acts 17:25, Rev 1:18)*

But there is another driving force through us, sent by God and giving glory back to God, which is compassion. Jesus was moved with compassion, cried with people in their pain (Jn 11:35; Rm 12:15), and wept over cities. (Lk 19:41-42)

Jesus got down low to reach us. (Phil 2:6-7) When Jesus, for example, looked on the ‘rich young ruler’, he felt love for him. (Mk 10:21) Jesus had heart! He was feeling the need, feeling the brokenness.

In the passage from Matthew 9, Jesus was seeing the people as ***‘harassed and helpless’***, and likened them to ***‘sheep without a shepherd.’*** This is a very stirring way to see people. This is almost an overwhelming way to feel. However, if this ‘feeling’ is from, through and to the Spirit of God, we can allow this feeling to blow through us. We can handle it!

Jesus said the eyes were the lamp of the body. (Mt 6:22-23) We need to see as Christ sees. Do not feel pressure to ‘see’ a certain way; rather open your heart to allow God to open your eyes, to see as he sees, feel as he feels, and respond – reach – accordingly. Let Jesus move you to ‘word’

and 'action'. If walking with Christ, you will be able to trust not only the 'Spirit Word' he brings to your mind (Jn 14:26), but also the feelings he arouses in your spirit. Go with this compassion!

#15 SPIRIT WORD (Sweet)

'Your words are sweeter than honey...'

(Ps 119:103)

The words of Christ are pure. Everything about the words of Christ drip sweetness. God – who is 'Word' (Jn 1:1) – became 'flesh' in Christ, and speaks words. (Jn 1:14)

Christ is the *living* Word, the Word made flesh, and his own spoken words are ***'spirit and life.'*** (Jn 6:63) We are so desensitized now to the words of Christ for 2 reasons: 1) We have heard them so much, that they have lost their novelty value; 2) Our hearts are sinful, and we have little appetite for the pure.

But to the childlike, to him who looks on Christ with faith, and listens to his words with an open heart, here the very essence of the sweetness of heaven drips on the soul. When you come to this place in quietness, the world can be passing by, rushing on, but you are arrested by the sweet words of Christ. You gaze. You settle. You feel. You drift. You hear rushing waters of the deep calling to the deep... (Ps 42:7)

Ask God this day to open your heart to hear afresh the living word of Christ. (Ex 33:18)

#16 SPIRIT WORD (Wisdom)

Jesus' words are wisdom. Jesus himself is one with Wisdom. Wisdom was the first of all creation (Pr 8:22), and Jesus was the firstborn over all creation. (Col 1:15) Jesus is living, pure, flowing wisdom.

Wisdom is not 'what' is said, but is the Spirit essence of the Speaker. Wisdom is Spirit. Words in themselves do not carry wisdom. Wisdom fills and carries words.

Wisdom has all things at its disposal, such as timing, heart, truth, history, and brings a timely word. Jesus gives life to all (Acts 17:25), and gives life to the dead. Jesus brings 'wisdom' to life in people's words, the same way Jesus brought Spirit life to people's bones in Ezekiel 37.

Paul quoted pagan philosophers, claiming and applying their words to the gospel message for that moment, that people, that hour. And these words came alive, were breathed with life, were given to Wisdom and now speak on behalf of Jesus Christ. (Acts 17:28) God is a Redeemer. The world is his, and he can and will make all things new. (Rev 21:5)

We take captive thoughts (and philosophies, and poems, and religions and art, etc.), and make them subject to Christ. (2 Cor 10:3-5) How? Well, by believing on Christ, and believing that the world and all that live in it are Christ's (Ps 24:1/Acts 17:25), and by knowing that all people are made in God's image (Gen 1:27), and that with the breath of God, the gospel of Jesus, we can bring light to bear even on lifeless creation.

We don't just see light come to our eyes, but we bring light *from* our eyes to objects and people. This is spiritual warfare, bringing the fight – the light – to the darkness.

We don't just look for Christ in a place or a person; we look to bring Christ to and through a place and a person, and so bring them to life, and redeem that which up to that moment may have been in darkness, eaten by locusts. (Joel 2:25)

#17 SPIRIT WORD (You!)

'...what we will be has not yet been made known...' (1 Jn 3:2)

My friends, this world is hard, broken, unclear, unpredictable, and not your true home, and nor where you will be the truest you! (Phil 3:20)

We work so, so hard to 'be', to 'arrive'. We run so, so hard to find a place of rest, to stop. Are you weary? Me, too!

Jesus called out to us all, ***'Come to me, all who are weary...'*** (Mt 11:28) Jesus also called out to us, ***'Is anyone thirsty...?'*** (Jn 7:37)

Know this: If you have come, weary and thirsty, to Jesus Christ, you have laid claim to your ultimate inheritance, your paradise destiny, your secret and true name! (Rev 2:17) You may still feel fragmented, patched together, barely holding on, but my brother, my sister, you are safe! You are now 'housed' in the name of the Lord (Pr 18:10), you are hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3), you are being made new (Rev 21:5), and you will find yourself whole one day, walking through the Paradise Gates on streets of gold.

Your inheritance is set. Your name is written in the book of life. (Lk 10:20) You are saved!

So even if life splinters and disperses around you, you are drawing every hour nearer to the most enchanting destination – heaven itself! (Jn 16:11b,33)

***'The path of the righteous is like the first
gleam of dawn – ever-brighter until the full
light of day!'*** (Pr 4:18)

#18 SPIRIT WORD (Jesus)

'Who are you, Lord?' (Acts 9:5)

Jesus is one with the Father. The Father is one with Jesus. The real way forward in spreading the good news, is by spreading the good news - not by debating false news.

We need to declare who Jesus is, and what his message is, and let his Holy Spirit vindicate and empower this testimony. Let his Holy Spirit convict hearts and fall on listeners. (Acts 10:44; Jn 16:8)

However, every now and again one must stand up to what is false, and contend! (1 Pe 3:15)
Gotta do it! And one of these key falsities is about the identity of God.

Many say that we all worship the same God – Muslims, Christians and Jews – and only differ on matters like the deity of Jesus Christ, etc. This is absolutely, 100% WRONG! My friends, let me explain. And if this offends or makes you uncomfortable, that is further evidence of this being true and a necessary reminder in your life!

Remember, this gospel – Jesus is God – is the very reason Jesus was crucified. So it *does* offend in its very essence. It offends everyone! Why? Well, ultimately not because Jesus is God, but because we are *not* God!

Briefly, but critically: God expressed himself in Jesus Christ. It is a mystery. It is unfathomable. But it is the revelation of God, and the claim of Jesus Christ. Key Scriptures to read, ponder,

soak in, and not resist, include: Isaiah 7:14/Mt 1:23; Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 53; John 1:1-5,9,14; John 8:58/Exodus 3:14; John 10:30,38; Mark 14:61-62/Daniel 7:13/Rev 1:13-18; John 14:6,9; 1 John 2:22.

People will hearken back to the God of Abraham, but Abraham is not our starting point or finishing point. Jesus Christ is our starting point (the Alpha) and the end point (the Omega). If people see and recognize Jesus Christ, this tells us that they were in the depths of their hearts open to the true God, the true Father. It is for this reason they recognized Jesus.

If people reject Jesus Christ, they are not worshipping the true Father. Jesus himself says this! (Jn 5:46) It is critical to note also that the Pharisees – descendants of Abraham and supposedly worshipping the God of Abraham – rejected Christ.

Jesus brought this to their attention in John 5:39-40. So to claim the God of Abraham – Jews or Muslims – is not a ‘pass’ on recognizing Christ. You cannot honor the Father without honoring the Son! (Jn 5:22- 23)

We preach Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2- 3), and if people receive this message, we know the ‘spirit of truth’ is and has been moving in them. If people do not receive this message, we know the ‘spirit of truth’ is not at work in their ‘faith’, their ‘god’. (1 Jn 2:6)

‘If you knew me, you would know my Father also.’ (Jn 8:19)

'If God were your Father, you would love me.'

(Jn 8:42)

#19 SPIRIT WORD (Only One Safe Place!)

'The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are saved!' (Pr 18:10)

The name of Jesus is the only name! (Zech 14:9; Acts 4:12) God himself has lifted this name higher than any other name, and all of creation comes from, moves through, and is 'to', Jesus Christ! (Col 1:15- 20; Phil 2:9-10) When I share Jesus, I feel the full spectrum of truth moving. I feel the sharp edge of the 'exclusive' name and gospel that is Christ. I feel people's discomfort with this claim to their soul, this shaking of their idols, this upsetting of their 'relevance' and unity with the world and culture. But I also feel the winds of heaven. I feel the sweet dripping of the pure 'Word', and the deep calling to the arid, forgotten places of the soul. I see people soften here. I see their eyes well up with tears. I see people walk out of tombs of despair and I see light come to their eyes.

Jesus is the only safe place in this life, and in the next life. Yes, his name and his gospel can be an aroma of death to some – those who turn *from* God, and live for only themselves and this mortal stretch of time. (2 Cor 2:16) But to others, he is the aroma of life.

Jesus is the only safe place! Let this be your confidence when you brave the winds of testifying to Christ. Jesus is your safe tower, and the only safe tower to the sinner. When we see this tower, and are fully convinced that only there, in the name of the Jesus, is safety, we will walk through darkness and storms to get there, and to bring people there.

#20 Truth is a Person!

God expressed his highest truth into flesh and blood. God, who is Spirit, and his Word, which is his very self, became flesh – Jesus Christ. (Jn 1:1-5,14) Truth in the flesh.

For this reason, Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees that they might read and know the scriptures, but if they do not come to him personally, their 'knowledge' has no value. (Jn 5:39-40) Christ is truth embodied, and knowing Christ, is knowing truth at its highest, most living, spiritual and powerful level. For this reason, the Pharisees noted that although Peter and John were 'unschooled' men, they had a courage, a force and purpose, that came from '**walking with Christ.**' (Acts 4:13) To know Jesus, is to have it all. '**Christ is all.**' (Col 3:11)

You can know Christ, but have little to no theological training. You can have *much* theological training, and *not* know Christ. You can know about Christ more than those that know Christ, and not know him yourself. You can even do miracles in his name, and not know him. (Mt 7:21-23)

To know the man, Jesus Christ, is, in a sense, where you can stop and hang up all the maps – theologies – that brought you to him. The purpose of the ‘Law’ was and is to bring us to Christ. (Gal 3:23-24) The purpose of Christ was not to bring us (back) to the Law. This direction flow of truth is absolutely critical, and must always, by the Spirit of God, calibrate how we do ‘truth’, how we do ‘Law’, how we do ‘love’, how we do ‘grace’.

If the purest essence of all God’s truth is a ‘person’ – Jesus Christ – what is the purest essence of truth in me? Is it not Christ in me? (Col 1:27) God, I am confident, looks not at what I know, but at how much I am of Christ, like Christ, **‘transformed into his likeness.’** (2 Cor 3:18) How am I transformed into his likeness? Contemplating him!

The same way the face of Moses lit up with the light of God, so, too, our lives light up with the highest truth of God by looking at Christ. We let his Spirit imbue our Spirit – and this is going to by-pass our minds! (Ex 33:18 - Ex 34)

Paul himself hoped and prayed that we would get past our own limited understanding of God, to ‘grasp’ how high and long and wide and deep is the love of God, and to **‘know this love that surpasses knowledge.’** (Eph 3:14-21) If Paul hoped we would know Christ in a way that surpasses knowledge, why do we constantly limit our own knowing of Christ to ‘answers’ and ‘insights’ and everything that works within our understanding, not within the boundless space of where our spirit and God’s Spirit commune?

The real challenge in growing close to Jesus, is that your own brothers – like his brothers, like Jeremiah's brothers – may not 'see' or affirm your spirit knowledge of Christ. What then? Do you distance yourself from Christ to be closer to men? Whose approval do you need to be close to Christ? From Genesis to Revelation, my friend, the closest people to Christ – the leaders of nations and masses – were misunderstood and 'countered' till the day they died! They were not made great by men; they were made great by God, despite men, and men's opposition.

Look up their stories: Moses, David (1 Sam 30), Zechariah, Job, the prophets, and ultimately, Jesus himself. (Is 53)

Truth is a person, Jesus Christ. And the truest expression of you is going to be from Christ in and through you. It will be Spirit, even as God is Spirit, and Christ's words are Spirit. (Jn 4:24; 6:63)

To grow in Christ is to know less, and know *him* more. (cf Jn 3:30) We know less *about* him – that our words can express – but know more *of* him, that our spirits recognize and enjoy.

Facts give way to Spirit, as the day draws near. The closer we draw to the sun, the more blinded we are, but the deeper its light penetrates us. We might start to lose sight of its shape, its place amongst other stars, its borders and boundaries, but its 'glory' reflects off our faces with more brilliance, and reaches more people!

Draw near to Christ. Sit with him. Whisper to him. Listen to his voice. Receive his visions and pictures and promptings. Listen! Don't make his Word fit your understanding; make your understanding bend and re-form according to his Word! (2 Cor 10:3-5)

Know his Scriptures well! Read them, ponder them. Jesus quoted them all the time – to refute the devil (Mt 4:1- 11), and to take people deeper (Jn 10:34; 22:44).

God himself quotes the Scriptures – Luke 9:35/Isaiah 42:1. We are told that the Spirit will recall to our minds what Christ has taught (Jn 14:26), so fill your minds with this material, so the Spirit can recall it to you when he chooses.

We are also told, however, that he will **'teach us all things'**, and this is direct whisper in the moment, such Spirit wisdom and power as Jesus himself had and could never have come through mere learning or preparation. (Lk 21:14-15, Mt 7:28-29)

(End of devotional: SPIRIT WORD)

I hope you have enjoyed this collection of 5 short devotionals.

For more resources, please visit these websites:

www.1peter1three.weebly.com

www.sharingyourfaith.weebly.com

'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26)