

# **In memory of Benjamin James Cowie**



## **EXHORTATIONS BY BRO. BEN COWIE**

**Born 27.8.85. Fell asleep in Christ 26.1.23**

**Ben was known for relatively short, but very insightful talks. He focused on the principles of the Truth and their practical application in life.**

### **PREPARATION FOR WHAT WAS COMING**

**Ben once commented on Psalm 90:12 in a note:**

**“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”. Our days are limited because we are mortal. We need to use our time wisely as we all will be accountable to God one day.**

**This document is a compilation of most of Ben’s exhortations delivered mainly at the Moreton Bay Ecclesia in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Also included are a few talks with exhortational value. His talks were never very long, but were appreciated for their insight into the way our nature works, and how the Truth should and can work in our lives. As we prepared this booklet it became clear that his exhortations were often based on things that were happening in his own life at the time. It was perhaps this fact that gave his talks a real intensity. He was taken far too soon, but leaves behind a useful legacy. Though dead, he yet speaketh.**

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The family acknowledges the labours of Sis. Helen Bollen (Margaret's sister) in typing out Ben's handwritten talks from among his papers and also from transcripts of recorded talks.

## HOW WE CAN STAY PATIENT WHEN WE HIT TOUGH TIMES IN LIFE

**Tough times are inevitable in everyone's life.**

- 1. Accept that there is no guarantee in life. Now I must stress at this time, this is not about becoming pessimistic. But the sooner we can accept this fact, the sooner we will learn to embrace our difficulties in life in a different light.**

**Recently I heard a quote that is going to stick with me for a bit. "Relax...nothing is under control". This quote has the power to eradicate so much of our anxiety in our lives. We can be a control freak when it comes to running our lives and end up being anxious when things go wrong in life. In such times we need to trust. Trust in God and lean on our Heavenly Father who is ultimately in control but still gives the freedom of choice. We need to ask God for love, "to accept the things we cannot change. Courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference".**

**A lot of this unhappiness comes about when we think we are doomed and that we have to spend the rest of the week (months or years) in the condition we find ourselves in. The one thing that helps a ton when going through these times is gratitude. On any given day we are blessed with so many things that we can so easily overlook. One way to help out is to have a gratitude journal and write down your blessings from the smallest to the biggest in it. If we look around, we can see people who don't even have what we have. It's hard to feel sad when you are in a grateful state and gratitude helps push through hard times and remain patient, and lifts our mood. Ultimately, in life what matters the most is the people you love. They are the ones who help us get through life. I'm sure many can agree with me on this. Since the beginning of time, people have endured challenges and still came through the tough times.**

### **A NOTE FOUND IN BEN'S PAPERS**

#### **Inspiring people:**

**In every group of people there are those who really stand out because they make a difference. They don't necessarily have to be those people who are in full view of the group. They may be someone who is a diligent worker, quietly working in the background. It may not even be great things they do but what they do makes a difference.**

## **EXHORTATION: CONTENTMENT AND GRATEFULNESS**

**I want to start today with a Russian Story. There was a rich peasant who was never satisfied. He always wanted more. He heard of a wonderful chance to get more land. For 1,000 Rubles he could have all the land he could walk around in a day. But he had to make it back by sundown or lose all his money. He rose early and set out. He walked on and on, his greed driving him just a little further as he saw new territory. Finally, he realized that he had to turn back and he had to walk very fast if he was to get back in time to claim the land. As the sun got lower in the sky, he quickened his pace. As the sun neared the horizon he began to run. Finally, he saw the starting place. His heart was pounding rapidly and he was gasping for breath but he gave it everything he had and plunged over the finish line and collapsed just seconds before the sun disappeared off the horizon. Did he get all that land? A stream of blood poured out of his mouth and he lay dead. His servant took a spade and dug a grave, long enough and wide enough to bury him in. So how much land did he really need? Was the feverish activity worth it?**

**Now let's look at another story from the Bible in Luke. Read with me Luke 12 verses 16-21. "And he spake a parable unto them saying, the ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully and he thought within himself saying, What shall I do because I have no room where to bestow my fruits. And he said, this will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul that hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat drink and be merry. But God said unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou has provided".**

**Well, what is the lesson of both of those stories. Neither were content with what they had and both were driven on with wanting more. Neither thought about anything or anyone else but the goal of acquiring more. They both came into the world with nothing and ended up in the grave with nothing.**

**Just as 1 Timothy 6 verse 7 tells us – "for we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out", and verse 8 tells us the attitude we should have, "and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content". Contentment is a virtue that challenges our materialistic society particularly as it relates to money and possessions.**

**Success is often measured by achievement in life. How much money we have, the position we hold, our possessions, etc. But does all this striving to acquire**

**“things” lead to greater happiness and contentment? Did it bring happiness and contentment to the men in both stories. Both spent the time bettering themselves and acquiring more, resulting in death for both.**

**All advertising instills in us, is that we need more, we need bigger, we need better. If we are fooled by that thinking we will never be happy or content and grateful for what we have. In fact, we will be so focused on acquiring more we will not even see what we actually have and be happy and thankful for it.**

**Luke 12 verse 14 contains a warning about covetousness – wanting more things – and Jesus said unto them, “take heed, and beware of covetousness. For a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth”.**

**What’s the saying? – don’t let your positions, possessions, etc. become the means of defining who you are.**

**God has called us to godliness with contentment. So, let’s explore this a little bit this morning. 1 Timothy 6 verse 6 tells us “but godliness with contentment is great gain”. Firstly, lets contrast verse 5 where some thought that godliness was a means of financial gain – a bit like the prosperity doctrine of some churches. Godliness is great gain if it comes with contentment.**

**So, what is contentment? Let’s take a look at Philippians 4 verses 11-12. The NIV gives a bit clearer meaning, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any day and every situation whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want”.**

**So, we see it challenges us to accept whatever comes our way. Hebrews 13 verse 5 says, “Let your conversation (way of life) be without covetousness and be content with such things as ye have”.**

**So, we can see that it is very important for us to aim towards contentment whatever our circumstances. Being grateful and thankful for what we have. Now that contentment comes only if it is linked to godliness.**

**What is this godliness? Surely it is living a life in obedience to the laws of God - a life centred on God and being aware of the shortness of life and aiming towards the Kingdom. So where is the focus? – certainly not on acquiring money and the things it can buy.**

**Godliness alone can give a person the sense that he lacks absolutely nothing. Imagine being so content, so fulfilled, so satisfied, so complete that you have**

**no sense of lack, but rather you are grateful and thankful for what you do have. That is godliness with contentment.**

**It helps you distinguish the difference between what we need and what we think we need and frees us up in serving God and looking to the needs of others. 1 Timothy 6 verse 8 tells us that we should be content with food and raiment, that's all. We all have that in this country. Once we want more than that we are being warned. Let's take a look at verse 9, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows". So, we see the pursuit of money and the things money can buy can lead to a whole lot of problems and temptations that come with wealth. It can cause you lots of unnecessary grief and trouble and can even turn you away from God. So, what if we are classified as well off which is probably most of us in Australia. What is Paul's advice to us? Let's have a look at verse 17, "Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy".**

**The NIV translates verse 17: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment". It can be a tendency for rich people to feather their own nest, but verse 18 tells us, "that they do good that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate".**

**Verse 18 NIV: "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share".**

**Verse 19: "Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come that they may lay hold on eternal life".**

**Verse 19 NIV: "In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life".**

**It has been said "When the dead rise and the Lord sets up his throne in judgement, the reality of treasure laid up in Heaven will be manifest, in the eyes of angels and men". Let us remember at death we all part from all those things we accumulated in our lives, and will be buried without it and if we are still alive**

**when we are called to judgement we won't be taking our stuff with us. Let's think about that and store up treasure in Heaven.**

**So where should our focus be?**

**Paul tells us in our reading today of 1 Timothy 6 verse 11: "But thou O man of God, flee these things – what things? (riches and the things money can buy) and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness". So instead of pursuing riches we should choose to follow the prime example of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness of our Lord Jesus Christ who didn't even have his own bed. The results of that will give us contentment knowing that our Heavenly Father will care for us.**

**So let us be determined to focus on contentment and we can do that by being grateful for what we have. We can be 100% sure that neither of the men in our story at the beginning were grateful for what they did have or even spent a tiny thought for others or how they might share what they had.**

**One of the things we can do to help with our being more grateful is to wake up each day and to write down 5 things we are grateful for. It will change your day and will start to take away our focus on wanting more.**

**So here right now, what 5 things as a group can we be grateful for and thank our God:**

- 1. For the opportunity of another day to serve God and improve our character.**
- 2. For health – if you have it.**
- 3. For family – and more so this family we are blessed to be a part of.**
- 4. For living in Australia.**
- 5. But most of all having an invitation to be in God's Kingdom – how fortunate are we for that.**

#### **BENEFITS OF PRACTICING GRATITUDE:**

**Boosts the immune system. Gratitude has been shown to help with overall well-being.**

**Improves mental health. Gratitude is one of many factors that contributes to positive mental health outcomes.**

**Stress is an epidemic in our Society triggered by a lack of gratitude.**

**Improves relationships.**

**Increased optimism.**

**Remembering that “godliness is profitable unto all things having a promise of the life that is and that which is to come”.**

**So now as we turn to the emblems on the table, let us remember our Lord who had nothing material in this life, but sacrificed all that we might have a hope of eternal life. Yet having nothing and not even a place to lay his head, he had the most important thing, godliness with contentment. Let us examine our lives and follow his example.**

### **WRITTEN NOTES FOUND AMONG BEN’S PAPERS**

- **Play to your strengths. Strength does not come from winning your struggles. You develop your strengths when you go through hardships and decide not to surrender – that is strength. Train your strengths.**
- **Nature dictates that the tide always turns eventually – it’s a universal law.**
- **We are all meant to shine as children of light – not just some of us but everyone. And as we let our light shine we give other people the permission to do the same.**
- **When you go through life you start to realize for the most part everyone is working with the same set of rusty, old tools – desire, commitment, honesty, kindness, persistence and of course love. Yes, flawed and bent as they may be, they work very well at times against the odds as we go through the fiery trials of life.**
- **When writing the story of your life, don’t let anyone else hold the pen.**
- **Your mind is a powerful force. It can enslave us or empower us. It can plunge us into the depths of misery or take us to the heights of ecstasy. We all have that awesome power – we just have to find it.**
- **God doesn’t promise us a life of comfort but much rather a life of refining of character.**
- **No matter how far we have gone or what we have done we are all of us only one heartfelt prayer away from experiencing God’s love, forgiveness and acceptance if we repent and forsake our foolish ways.**
- **Our life is a refining process to purge out the impurities of the gold and shine forth the image of Christ in our character, and prepare us for immortality.**



## **EXHORTATION: THE COURAGE OF CONVICTION**

**We would all agree that we live in a materialistic, consumer orientated society strongly affected by Humanism. This affects all of us to a greater or lesser degree. We are all affected by the environment we live in.**

**Most of us here today are accustomed to a fairly high standard of living. With this comes the idea that happiness comes from a recognition of accomplishment, material possessions, luxury holidays and just general well-being.**

**Test yourself. Have you ever had the thought that if only you had that one missing factor, you would be set for life, happy and secure. Well don't be deceived by the advertising and the thinking of this world. We just have to open our Bibles and we will get the right perspective. Of course, the most important things that really matter are spiritual things and matters of the heart.**

**Do you know that the word "heart" is found nearly 1,000 times in the KJV Bible.**

**Now we may be thinking that it's talking about the organ in our body that pumps blood around and keeps us alive. Well, this is not the case. In many cases it has to do with the inner man. When used metaphorically it refers to the mind, the emotions and will.**

**We may have heard before the quote by Brother John Carter, "The heart is that deeper part of the mind where character is formed".**

**Now we would all agree that God is deeply concerned with the inner man or the condition of the heart, our character.**

**Have a look with me at 1 Samuel 16 verse 7, "But the Lord said unto Samuel, look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him, for the LORD seeth not as man seeth for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart".**

**So, we can see from this that God doesn't really care too much about what we look like, but he is much more concerned with what makes us tick. The heart governs our actions, works, pursuits, etc. So how important it is then for us to take special care of it.**

**Proverbs 4 verse 23 says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life". The idea of keeping it has to do with guarding and protecting.**

**What we do, what we say, is first of all a product of what we are on the inside. What we are in essence, what we think.**

**In his Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke strongly against the mere external performance-orientated religion of the Pharisees. In Matthew 5 verses 17-48 no less than six times he contrasts the mere external approach to the Old Testament Scriptures as was taught by the Pharisees, with his own teaching which of course was in harmony with the true design of God's Word.**

**Have a look at this in Matthew 5.**

**Verses 21-22 "you have heard: but I say"**

**Verses 27-28 "you have heard: but I say"**

**Verses 31-32 "It was said: but I say"**

**Verses 33-34 "you have heard: but I say"**

**Verses 38-39 "you have heard: but I say"**

**Verses 43-44 "you have heard: but I say"**

**So, what was the Lord showing the people? That it was important to live by the moral precepts taught by their religious leaders based on the Old Testament. But what was most important was the motivation for doing those things coming from the heart, from a love of God, not from only just conforming to laws.**

**God is concerned with what is going on in our heart. What we are all about is developing a character like God.**

**So, we can see that the heart is so important, to what we say and do. We need to become heart surgeons and regularly do open heart surgery with the scalpel of the Word. We see this point of view in Hebrews 4 verse 12, "For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart".**

**So, what is that? Opening our hearts to see the workings of it and checking the health of our hearts.**

**Lamentations 3 verses 40-41, "Let us search and try our ways and turn again to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens".**

**This gives the idea of cutting out our heart and carrying it to God so he can check out the health of it and so perform some repair work.**

**Let's stop for a while and do a little inward searching. What is our heart? What is the essence of who we are? What are our thoughts and intents; they will determine our destiny 100%.**

**Have a look with me at Deuteronomy 30 verses 15-16, "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it".**

**So, what is our goal in life? Where are we heading? What is the top priority in our lives?**

**We are here today to examine ourselves. Today is still a day of opportunity for us. A time to get things right as we come around the Lord's table. Well, let us all be determined to serve God and to make Him our top priority in our lives.**

**Now let's work out how we can accomplish this. It takes courage to change. Progress is impossible without change and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.**

**What is courage? Well actually you are going to be surprised to realize that it is related to the heart. The word courage is defined as the ability to do something that frightens one. This is why we associate it with bravery. However, it originates from medieval English denoting the heart, as the seat of feelings.**

**Courage: Is the choice and willingness to confront agony, pain, danger, uncertainty. From old French "corage" and from Latin "Cor" or Heart".**

**So, we could sum that up as the ability to do something brave out of a motivation from the heart.**

**Now Biblical courage that is good, needs God to strengthen and motivate the believer to be courageous. So, how can this happen in our lives. Well, our heart has to be undivided and guided by God's word.**

**Have a look with me at the reading we had today, Joshua 1 verses 6-9, "Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all**

**the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest”.**

**Joshua was to lead the people into the promised land. They were going to need faith and courage so God told Joshua how he could acquire this. In verse 7 we see that he had to be steadfast in obeying God’s law – an undivided heart set in the right direction. Now we know this is not easy for any of us, but God told him how to get this in verse 8 and we can use the same formula. So, we see firstly from verse 1 that it is God’s advice and the secret to achieving strength and courage is by having a life focused on God.**

**Without the focus being on God’s word, verse 8, we are not going to achieve this. See the last part of verse 8 – this is the only way of making our way successful. Why? Because it gives us singleness of purpose and direction. Joshua needed that to lead the people into battle against the nations.**

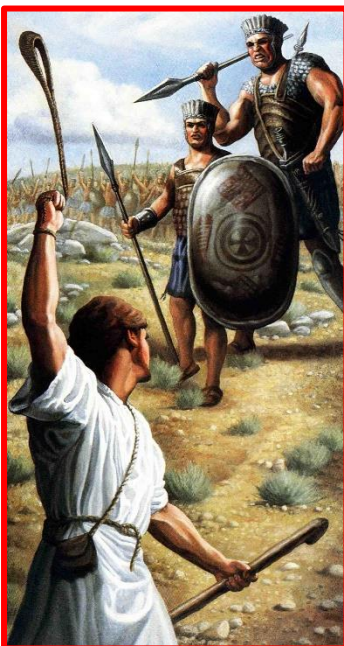
**What about Joshua and Caleb? Even earlier, they had total confidence that God would enable them to overcome all the difficulties in their path to conquer the land. Let’s read Numbers 14 verses 7-9, “And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us, their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not”.**

**They did this and literally risked their lives. Have a look at Numbers 14 verse 10, “But all the congregation bade stone them with stones”. The congregation were going to kill them. So, did they accomplish what they said? Yes, they did. In Joshua 14 Caleb received the very place that made Israel’s heart melt in verse 8. Let’s read Joshua 14 verse 12 where Caleb said, “Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said”.**

**Courage is something that not only affects you but can inspire others. We can see this in Daniel 1. Daniel and his three friends were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar to be trophies for him. It was a risk to Daniel's life to defy the king's orders, yet Daniel determined to not defile himself with the king's meat. He had total confidence in his God and inspired his friends to do likewise.**

**So, let's have a look at how the heart and courage are linked. Have a look at David, a man after God's own heart. God saw what was motivating him. Have a look at the example of his faith and confidence in his God in 1 Samuel 17 verse 26. "And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"**

**He saw the challenge of Goliath in defying God. Was he afraid? He had the courage of his convictions – God knew what was in his heart and here was the proof of him being courageous - 1 Samuel 17 verse 32, "And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine".**



**He faced the giant Goliath that soldiers were fearful of because his heart was right with God. 1 Samuel 17 verses 45-47, "Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth: that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands".**

**We can face the giants in our life. The greatest example of course, is the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the one who was ever obedient to the will of God his Father as he approached the cross with faith and courage, he could say, "I have glorified you on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" - John 17 verse 4.**

**The cross was still ahead but by faith he anticipated the successful completion of his mission. Isn't that courage in the ultimate example. His life was one of success and triumph because he was totally confident in his Father's ability to strengthen him even in the garden when his friends failed him.**

**So, what's some of the lessons we can take for our daily lives?**

**1. WE NEED GOD'S WORD DAILY**

**This will give us the courage to look at our hearts and to make those changes while we are still in the day of opportunity, and have time to get things right. The word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose and the lion will defend itself.**

**2. WE NEED THE COURAGE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY**

**As we go through life, we can't always choose our circumstances but we can always choose how we will respond to them. No matter what challenges we face we have the power to ultimately choose whether to let the world affect us or to let it make us stronger in our walk. We need to resist the impulse to blame woes on others, but instead to make a decision to own our lives fully and to put full trust in God.**

**3. WE NEED TO LIVE WITH INTEGRITY**

**Integrity is the only path upon which you will never get lost. To put integrity at the cornerstone of every decision you make requires a willingness to do what is right, above what may be convenient. This may at times make you take a path that maybe uncomfortable and where risk of failure or disapproval may be high. Integrity is the qualification of being honest and having strong moral principles, moral uprightness. It is generally a personal choice to hold oneself to consistent moral and ethical standards.**

**4. WE NEED THAT COURAGE TO LET GO**

**Too many times I think as human beings we like to feel we are in control. We need to let go and know that God is in control. We may not always get what we want but we will get everything we need, and this is looking at the bigger picture of life.**

**5. COURAGE TO BE A LEADER**

**Leadership is not a position. It's a choice. Every day we have opportunities to be a leader. The essence of leadership is inspiring others to move in a direction they may otherwise not have gone; to accomplish more than they may otherwise have sought to accomplish;**

**and to grow into someone they may otherwise not have become. When we choose the path of integrity, personal responsibility and courage, we will automatically shine our lights so brightly that this will help others on their walk to the Kingdom as well.**

## **6. WALK WITH GIANTS**

**The people we surround ourselves with have a huge impact on how we see ourselves and how we deal with challenges and how we see things in general. We need to surround ourselves with people who are going to help us reach our end goal – the Kingdom.**

## **7. TO BE BRAVE**

**Courage is like a muscle. The more you act with it the stronger it becomes. It begins with a single act of courage, followed by another and another. You don't have to see the whole staircase, you just have to take the first step.**

**Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the ability to act in the presence of fear.**

**Courage isn't always loud. Sometimes it's just that quiet voice saying "I will try again tomorrow".**

**"Success is not final. Failure is not fatal, it is courage, to continue that counts".**

**One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous or honest.**

**So, let's have a look at our heart health today.**

**We use the words of one of our hymns, Hymn 66 to prepare us for the emblems:**

**"Search me, O God and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting".**

**"Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for Yahweh thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest", Joshua 1 verse 9.**

**One of Ben's favourite phrases was "strength and honour". These are the qualities of the Bride of Christ in her probation. Proverbs 31:25 – "Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come."**

## **EXHORTATION: COVID 19 – A REVIEW OF ITS CONSEQUENCES**

**Well brothers and sisters, what a year it has been. One like no other. One that has changed society as we know it. I thought today that I would do a bit of an overview and see the effect it has had on us as individuals and our ecclesia.**

**The year began with bushfires with huge property and wildlife loss. For some as we turned our calendar to 2020 with all the anticipation of a better year that was to come. But it had hardly begun and Covid emerged and as it started to take effect, travel started to cease as well and schools and work places shut down and forced work from home. Ecclesial gatherings ceased and borders began to close within Australia. People were dying from this virus that had swept the World. It brought life as we know it to a stand-still. Our world changed in a moment.**

**So, how did we go? Well for a lot of people it was panic stations as life changed and change is always a challenge.**

**It had different effects on people. For a number it was a welcome relief from life, but for others a huge void existed. It was scary, there was a virus out there and it was deadly and our lives changed.**

**Did this slower pace provide a time for reflection on the more important things in our lives and our relationship with our God? Or have we filled the void with “other things”.**

**We are more fortunate than most as we lived in a Covid-free bubble. But did this make us more prayerful and grateful?**

**It would be very easy to label this year as a bad year, and to be fair, many people in this world have done that. But there are also hidden good things that were in this year too. So, the question for us is what will we remember this year as the worst year or one of our best.**

**Covid has turned a lot of things upside down. How we live, how we work, how we interact, communicate, move about, travel, every aspect of our lives has been affected. It has been a great leveler – it paused economies. It brought countries to a complete stop – travel ceased, schools closed, jobs were lost, people were confined to their homes. And we saw the funny side to it when the toilet rolls just vanished off the shelves.**

**We have all been pushed out of our comfort zone at some point this year as we have been forced to change and that can do two things – it can bring about**



**amazing personal growth or cause a slide backwards. Difficult times can make us draw closer to God as we feel a greater need for His care and guidance or it can cause us to drift away.**

**Tough times develop character and give you an insight into the real you. They can cause anxiety, confusion, anger, helplessness.**

**Good things – resilience, adaptability, tapping into unknown potential, growth.**

**Every crisis is an opportunity for change as it turns our world upside down and a new world emerges, sometimes better, sometimes for the worse.**

**Do we call on God in our time of stress and trouble?**

**The psalmist did in Psalm 107. Have a look at Verse 6, “then they cried unto Yahweh in their trouble” and “he delivered them out of their distresses.” And what’s more it is repeated in verse 13, verse 19 and verse 28.**

**We all know that God is in control even in these Covid times.**

**What does he want us to learn at “this time”. He has given us a “pause” moment to reflect. Time with our families, time with our Bibles open, time to think about our direction, to change things and remove the many distractions in our lives that take us way from God.**

**A practical way of excelling during this time is to follow a path that moves your mindset and behavior from survival mode to one of thriving mode. This means deciding to adapt. This requires change. We need to stop – think and rejig our expectations. Focus, courage and curiosity are needed!**

**What is our focus? What takes up most of your time? I’m sure for all of us the end game plan is the Kingdom of God! So, what do we need to do to reach that goal. In 1 Thessalonians 2 verse 12 we read that we should walk worthy of God who has invited us to share in His Kingdom and glory.**

**This involves a process of development. The development of character like that of our God. Our life is all about growth and Covid has helped us along that path. God is working in the lives of all of us and at the same time bringing about His purpose.**

## **FOCUS**

**Our world is designed to distract – rushing around and business is leaving us little to no time to focus on what is most important. Try a week of a slower pace**

**and notice how it impacts on your mindset, behavior and the connection you have with others and God. Sometimes we just need to stop being mice on the treadmill rushing to our grave.**

## **COURAGE**

**Fear is the biggest barrier to change. Believe in yourself, take risks – start with small changes every day that take you out of your comfort zone. Small steps of bravery practiced overtime build courage and confidence and will unlock huge potential and possibilities you can never imagine.**

## **CURIOSITY**

**Have the curiosity and interest in learning, and continue to build your knowledge. We start by increasing our Bible knowledge.**

**What about writing down our thoughts, feelings and behavior so we can see how we are developing as a person.**

**God is the one who has allowed this Covid “pause” moment so we can stop and reassess and do something about the countless distractions in our lives.**

**Now we come to our reading for today where our Lord Jesus Christ warned us of times like this. Luke 21 verses 25-26 reading from the NIV, “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth nations will be in anguish at perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.” It’s like that, isn’t it.**

## **CHRISTMAS STAR**

**According to NASA, Jupiter and Saturn align with one another every 20 years or so but not nearly as close together as they will be in 2020. The planets have not aligned this close in about 400 years, nor has their alignment been visible (or occurred at night) in about 800 years.**

**We read on. Verses 27-28, “and then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”. That’s the end result. We can be the clouds of saints.**

**So, it has to get worse before it gets better because verse 28 says, “and when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh”.**

**God is in control. We need to look up and be ready. God has given us a wake-up call. Let us use it. Let's have a look at Luke 21 verses 34-36 a warning for us today.**

**Luke 21 verses 34-36, "And take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness and cares of this life and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man".**

**Now as restrictions ease let us not slip back into the old ways. Don't be deceived. We have up till this stage had it pretty easy compared to the rest of the world who have been in "shut down" mode for most of this year and had to mask up. For sure, at any time it could get worse for us, but at the same time we don't need to be afraid.**

**Let's read Mark 4 verses 37-40 the incident when Jesus was asleep in the ship and a violent storm came and they were afraid that the ship would sink. Remember what Jesus said on that occasion – after he stilled the storm – verse 40, "why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" As a whole we need to keep working on our faith. We know what that needs us to do. Faith comes by hearing God's word. Let us all lean more on our God and talk to Him in prayer. Let Him talk to us through the reading of his word.**

**It's one of those things, we all need to adapt to life changes and any crisis that comes along and develop a faith that trusts totally in our God.**

**We at times may think that we can control our lives and make plans but Covid has taught us that we can't and circumstances can change in an instant. Let's all be more determined today to develop a closer relationship with our God and be a source of strength and encouragement to others.**

**Let's have a look at a favourite Psalm to gain some of this strength.**

**Psalm 23, "The LORD is my shepherd I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil;**

**my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”**

**Sheep trust their shepherd – they have learnt that the shepherd is concerned with their welfare and trust him. Even as the valley gets dark, rocky and difficult the sheep trust the shepherd to lead them out of it.**

**Even in a pandemic and the uncertain times God is in control and we can trust Him. Anxiety therefore in a pandemic can be replaced with peace, trusting our God, confident that the angels are at work among the nations.**

**Change is an opportunity. Transition in life allows you to consider where your priorities lie. How do you really want to spend your time on earth? What is really important to us? Where do we waste our time and energy? With a clear sense of values you will become more resilient when it comes to stresses and change. Transition means opportunities to help friends and family and our ecclesia.**

**Let’s use this time as an opportunity to make those changes, to embrace the character-building moments in our lives, as our minds open up and fully understand the end game. To live life not in fear, but courage to know our Heavenly Father is in control of all things in our lives making us worthy of His Kingdom.**

**Now as we turn our attention to the emblems before us, let us examine our lives and endeavour to strengthen our faith in the coming days for most surely our redemption draweth nigh.**



**Isaiah 56:6-7 – “Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to Yahweh, to serve him, and to love the name of Yahweh, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *shall be* accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.**

## **EXHORTATION: FRIENDSHIP – ARE YOU A GOOD FRIEND?**

**Let me ask you a question. If you had something really valuable, how would you look after it? What a ridiculous question you are probably thinking. Of course, we would all care for it and treasure it and guard it from being lost.**

**Well, there is something valuable that we all have and that is “friends”. So, do you value your friends? Well, you should, and not take them for granted.**

**In today’s society there are many lonely, friendless people who sometimes die in their homes and no one misses them, or cared about them.**

**Do you know that it is well known that friendships enrich your life and improve your health. Friendships increase your sense of belonging and purpose.**

**Right in the beginning God established this gift. Genesis 2 verse 18, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him”. So that was why the woman was created. Someone to share the beauties of creation and later the sorrows of life.**

**Everybody needs friendship, encouragement and help. What people can accomplish by themselves is almost nothing compared to their potential when working with others and doing things with others brings contentment. Besides, “loners” are rarely happy people.**

**King Solomon knew this. Let’s have a look at Ecclesiastes 4 verses 9-12. I’m reading from the NIV, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down his friend can help him up, but pity the man who falls and has no-one to help him up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone. Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken”.**

**Everybody needs somebody to come alongside and help.**

**If you understand that and are willing to give to others and help them, and maintain the right motives, their lives and yours will be better.**

**In the Bible the strongest term for “friend” implies being close like a bosom buddy. It actually occurs in the Old Testament in situations of betrayal. Proverbs 16 verse 28, let’s read it. “A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends”. Why do you think this is so? Well probably to remind us that the closest friendships need guarding and protecting.**

**Proverbs says that a few close friends are better than a host of acquaintances. Our Lord's relationship with the beloved disciple John, endorses that point.**

**Our friends and companions have a big influence on us and can affect our attitude to many things including our attitude to the things of God. So, we need to choose our friends well. It should be in the circle of the truth. However even in the truth not all friends are good friends when it comes to the things of God.**

**We need to ask ourselves the question "Do our friends encourage us in serving in the truth; encourage us to attend the meeting; do the daily readings and being committed to our ecclesia?"**

**Listen to what Proverbs has to say about that in Proverbs 19 verse 27, "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge". And in Proverbs 14 verse 7, "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge".**

**What about attitudes of character? Let's look at Proverbs 22 verse 24, "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go". Why? Verse 25, "Lest thou learn his ways; and get a snare to thy soul".**

**This is on the principle that "bad companionship corrupts good morals". You become like the people you keep company with for bad or good. Proverbs 13 verse 20, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed".**

**Whatever direction your friends are heading in will have a major influence on your future, if you allow it. So, we must choose wisely. The incredible thing about friendship is that sometimes it just happens. Why do you think that this is the case?**

**Have a look at 1 Samuel 18 verse 1, "And it came to pass when he (David) had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul".**

**So what triggered this? It was probably what he saw in David's words in 1 Samuel 17 verses 45-47.**

**So, David's bravery in defending Israel from Goliath was what they shared as a similar attitude to the things of God. That's what attracted him to David and he remained loyal to him even though he knew that the kingdom would go to his friend. Much as Jonathan loved his father, he supported his friend even when**

**Saul was unreasonable, contrary to the notion that “blood is thicker than water”.**

**Proverbs 18 verse 24, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly. There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”.**

**And did David forget Jonathan when he died? No, he remained loyal to the promise he had made, and cared for his son.**

**In the early years the responsibility falls largely on parents who choose an environment, ecclesially and at leisure where their children can have friends from families of similar attitudes to life.**

**Just have a look around at the little ones in our meeting. They are already forming friendships that may last them a life-time, that will have a huge impact on them in their turbulent teenage years.**

**So, what are the characteristics of good friends? What about constancy and reliability. What would be the good of being a good friend one day and ignoring you the next – not much of a friendship is it.**

**Friends stick with you at all times – just the opposite of the prodigal son’s friends. Oh, they were friends alright while they were benefiting from the good times money could buy, but when the times grew tough they evaporated, just like the funds.**

**What about loyalty? Do you stick up for your friends? And don’t betray their confidence or talk about them behind their back. We know that does happen. And it’s a definite no-no. Proverbs 17 verse 17, “Love your friend at all times”. No back-stabbing.**

**Friends share the same goal in the truth – God’s Kingdom. So, they give direction in difficult times and can guide them through dark days even though the advice might not be heeded.**

**Good friends are like stars. You don’t always see them but you know they’re always there.**

**When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our life means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion; who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement; who can**

**tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness; that is a friend who cares.**

**In any human relationship there is a quote that reminds us what our priorities should be in dealing with people, particularly friends.**

**The least important word is “I”. The most important word is “We”. The two most important words are, “Thank you”. The three most important words are, “all is forgiven”. The four most important words are, “What is your opinion?” The five most important words are, “You did a good job”. The six most important words are, “I want to understand you better”.**

**So, let’s once again ask the question. Do you value your friends? As we turn to the emblems let us remember what our Lord did in laying down his life for his friends.**

**And were his friends worthy of his friendship? In his hour of need, look at his friends – in the garden when he needed their support and encouragement what were they doing? – sleeping!!! Have a look at Matthew 26 verse 40, “And he cometh unto the disciples and findeth them asleep and said unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?”**

**What about Judas? Did he remain faithful and loyal – he betrayed his friend.**

**And Peter? In Matthew 26 verse 34, “Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee, that this night before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice”. We know how that ended.**

**So, what makes us his friends? In the words of our Lord, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”.**

**Matthew 25 verse 40, “And the king shall answer and say unto them, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me”.**

#### **THOUGHT OF THE DAY:**

**Never take someone for granted. Hold every person close to your heart, because you might wake up one day and realize that you’ve lost a diamond while you were too busy collecting stones.**

**ARE YOU A GOOD FRIEND?**



## **EXHORTATION: HAGGAI – CONSIDER YOUR WAYS**

**Have there ever been times in your life when nothing seems to go right? Work is scarce, money doesn't seem to go around and bills keep mounting up!!!**

**I guess we can all answer, “sure that happens to all of us at times”. Perhaps it is for a reason.**

**Well today we are going to have a look at a time in Israel's history when this was the case and yes, there was a reason for it.**

**Let's have a look at this hard-to-find little book, Haggai.**

**We will see that there are amazing parallels between the times of Haggai and our day.**

**The world's economies are slowing down but compared to past eras of history, we still have reasonable standards of living and many things to take our time up to the neglect of the truth, as was the problem in Haggai's time.**

**Before we look at the book, let's set the background scene. In BC 606 Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and took captive many of the Jews. Why did God allow this? It was punishment for the nation's sins and what's more they were told that the captivity would be for 70 years in Jeremiah 25 verses 1-11. Did the people listen? Well, some did, but Jehoiakim and later Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and because of that Jeremiah's warning in Jeremiah 27 verse 8 came to pass. “And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand”.**

**Now a 70 year period of desolation was also added dating from BC 586 “to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years”, 2 Chronicles 36 verse 21 tells us.**

**The years went by and the predicted time came close. People were born and people died. Rulers came and went and Cyrus became ruler when Medo-Persia took over from Babylon.**

**In fulfillment of prophecy, Cyrus made a decree inviting Jewish exiles to return and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. We read about this in 2 Chronicles 36**

verses 22-23, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up”.

Led by Zerubbabel who later became Governor, and Joshua the High Priest, a remnant of the captivity – about 50,000 left the comfort of their homes in Babylon to go back to Israel. Could you have done that? It would have been a lot of hard work ahead of them. Houses to build, crops to plant, and a new Temple to build. But they went. They sacrificed a lot.

And when the foundation of the Temple was laid there was great rejoicing. Have a look at Ezra 3 verse 11, “And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was built”.

It was an exciting time. Then we see the “but” word beginning in verse 12, “But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:”

They were longing for the good old days when they had Solomon’s Temple – it was so grand. Added to that the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah and troubled them in building.

In fact, they sent letters to Babylon undermining the Jews and they were so effective that the work ceased at the command of Artaxerxes.

In fact, the work stopped for 15 years. It remained just a foundation. For all that time a skeleton of what might have been. But were they to be blamed for stopping if they were commanded to stop? Well, yes. Have a look at Haggai 1 verse 2, “Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built”. They were now justifying their actions by saying, “well technically the 70 years is not yet up so we’ll just wait”. They could have been like David and collected material for the temple, but human nature is not inclined that way.

**What they did was put their effort into their own comfort. They built themselves houses to dwell in with all the best of things.**

**Now that's where the little book of Haggai fits in.**

**Firstly, we notice the references to the dates when Haggai gave his prophecies.**

**Chapter 1 verse 1, "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying".**

**Chapter 2 verse 1, "In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying".**

**Chapter 2 verse 10, "In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying".**

**Chapter 2 verse 20, "And again the word of the LORD came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying".**

**So, we can see that the prophecies spanned a period of 4 months.**

**So, what was God's attitude to the people in the 15 years when the temple lay neglected. Well, He knew what they were saying to justify their actions.**

**Haggai 1 verse 4, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?"**

**So, he challenges that and says, what you are saying is that the time is not right for working on my house. BUT the time is right to spend time building yourselves elaborate houses.**

**In verse 5 He challenges the people to "consider your ways". Rotherham says "apply your heart to your own experiences". All he asks is for them to stop and carefully examine their motives and actions and then to reflect on how things had been going in their lives. Sometimes we need to do this in our lives. It was now the sixth month. Haggai 1 verse 1 told us that. How did they think the crops were going? Well, they could see that as usual, not good. More hard times ahead. Not enough food or water for that matter. Haggai 1 verse 6, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes". Verse 6 tells us**

**that they had wallets that felt like they had holes in them and the money just seemed to disappear. Ever felt like that?**

**In Verses 7-8, “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountains, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD”. Yahweh of Hosts asks them once again to “consider your ways” in the light of the state of Yahweh’s house and get back to work. He didn’t care about the fact that it was not going to be like Solomon’s temple. The building didn’t count to Him but the fact that they were doing a work of God. He would be pleased by their faithful willing service. It was their attitude to the work that counted.**

**Verse 9-11, “Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? Saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. The heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands”. Now He tells them that all their difficulties over the past 15 years were arranged by God. Every time they thought the harvest was going to be great, God says, “I did blow upon it”. Why did He do that? Because they were totally preoccupied with their own things, running to their own houses.**

**Thinking Jews would have realized this, and that it was a punishment for disobedience.**

**Well, the people did listen and the words of Haggai had an effect. They could have ignored him but instead they obeyed the voice of Yahweh their God and the words of Haggai the prophet. Verse 12, “Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, will all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.”**

**Let’s read verse 13-14, “Then spake Haggai the LORD’S messenger in the LORD’S message unto the people, saying I am with you, saith the LORD. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbael the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God”. Yahweh was with them.**

**So how long was it until they began the work? Verse 15 tells us in the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the sixth month. 24 days for them to consider their ways, and their spirits revived to commence the work.**

**So, you would imagine that the work went ahead with no problems – after all God was with them. Well, no. Ezra 5 verses 2-5 tells us that the Samaritans who had previously contributed to stopping the rebuild, again tried to stop the work. But the eye of their God was upon them. God was testing them to see what their attitude was like.**

**Darius sent a letter to the Samaritans that they were to let the work of this house of God alone. Ezra 6 verse 7, “Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place”. And that they were to help them with provisions - Ezra 6 verses 8-12.**

**Can you imagine how the Samaritans felt and how the Jews would have realized that God could do anything.**

**And the work went on and was completed. Let’s read Ezra 6 verse 14-15, “And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zachariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And the house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king”.**

**This time there was great rejoicing by all.**

**What a turn of events!!!**

**So was God pleased with the house as such. No. But he was interested in the attitude of the people to the work. They were placing value on the things of God and worked enthusiastically, inspired by their leaders.**

**What a change of attitude. And did the blessings come? Have a look at Haggai 2 verse 18. Rotherham has “Consider from this day onwards from the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month”.**

**Verse 19, “Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth; from this day will I bless you”.**

**Leviticus 26 verses 3-5 would come to pass. “If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely”.**

**Amidst the trials, frustrations and difficulties of life, we must learn the lessons of Haggai’s time, that Yahweh will encourage those who seek his ways in spirit and in truth, and work in the house of God.**

**The world is in a mad rush of pleasure and evil, and is rushing along to that day when Yahweh will shake all nations and set up his kingdom.**

**You have probably heard about the habits of geese. Well, I think they best summarize how results are accomplished in the building of God’s Ecclesia. Did you know that as each bird flaps its wings, it creates an “uplift” for the bird following. By flying in a ‘V’ formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if the bird flew alone.**

**What about people who share a common direction and sense of community. Well, they can get where they are going more quickly because they propel each other and encourage each other on the road of life.**

**Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone and it quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the “lifting power” of the bird immediately in front.**

**So do we stay in formation with those of the ecclesia and lend a helping hand as well as accepting help, so the journey is made easier.**

**When the lead bird gets tired, it rotates back into the formation and another goose takes the lead. Perhaps we should all learn to take a turn at the difficult jobs, not to be prominent or in power, but to let another take a breather.**

**The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed. Let’s encourage those up front and urge them on.**

**When a goose gets sick or wounded, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it recovers or dies, and then launch out on their own with another formation or catch up with the flock.**

**The lesson is obvious isn't it. The beauty of the lessons taught by the geese is that the whole group are intertwined. Being in an ecclesia gives us people who have the same goal – the Kingdom. The second lesson encourages us to remain in formation with them, rather than doing our own thing. As we travel, we will then have help along the way and also be able to help others.**

**So let us “consider our ways” in the light of what we have looked at today and apply the lessons in our lives following the example of our Lord, who we come to remember today.**

**THOUGHT OF THE DAY:**

**“To get the true measure of a man’s capacity note how much more he does than is required of him”.**



**Ezekiel 43:4-7 – “And the glory of Yahweh came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the house. And I heard *him* speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me. And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever.”**

## **EXHORTATION: NEW YEAR – EFFECTIVE GOAL SETTING**

**We are here once again assembled around the table of our Lord. This is a little different as it is the beginning of a new year 2017.**

**2016 is gone. It is now the past, it is now history. Everything that seemed important, things that may have caused us worry and stress are over – faded into the past.**

**It is a good thing to pause and reflect on the past and take a little thought for our future. Well, what can we learn from the past year – probably many things. One thing is that time is relentless and the good part is that it brings us closer to the return of our Lord. When all that will matter is what God thinks of us. So let us spend a little time at verses 9-10 of our reading.**

**Psalms 90 verses 9-10, “For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away”.**

**So, what we do with our time is vital. The thing is we all have 24 hours in a day. Our future is going to be determined by how we spend it.**

**Have a look at verse 12: “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”. Our days are limited because we are mortal. We need to use our time wisely as we all will be accountable to God one day.**

**Do you know that it is also possible to recover time. Yes. Ephesians 5 verse 16 says, “Redeeming the time because the days are evil”. Redeeming has the idea of buying back.**

**This morning is a good time to make the most of a new beginning. To resolve to make more time for the really important things. Time for a personal stock take and review of the past year and to set goals for the new year.**

**It’s the perfect time to turn over a new page in our lives. Which is how the popular idea of new year’s resolutions came about.**

**I don’t know about you but whenever I set a new goal or make a decision to change something in my life, I always start out great. I’m sure that this is the moment of change and it’s going to be successful and I’m determined not to give up. But life gets in the way, road bumps and sometimes the unexpected**



**happens. We start to lose confidence and then down the track we end up giving up. Is this what happens to you?**

**Well, you are not alone. It's interesting that a study has shown that one in three new year resolutions are abandoned by the end of January and 73% of people give up before they achieve their goals.**

**So why is this?**

**Well for any change to succeed we need to change our thinking, we need to rewire our brain. We are all creatures of habit. Some of us more than others. Habitual habits are created by thinking patterns that create neural pathways. So, if you want another way to look at it, it's sort of like a four-wheel drive in the sand. It's easy to just stay in the ruts. It is so hard to get out of them and form new tracks.**

**So, will-power is not going to work as it only just reinforces the behavior and makes the pathways stronger.**

**What is needed is new thought patterns. A new neural pathway.**

**So, the plan is to focus on your goals and make sure the goals are realistic. Then take small steps – one at a time – great things can be accomplished in small steps one at a time. Focus your thinking on new behaviours and thought patterns to create new pathways.**

**Focus on the present – what you can do right now to start the change. Be mindful – don't let the past failure deflect you. Concentrate on the moment.**

**That is the secret of success in changing things in our lives and our life has to be one of change as we conform to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Changing our character takes a life-time of incremental steps.**

**So what goals are we going to set for ourselves for the days ahead, while we still have time.**

**We can make a difference each day.**

**Kofi Annan once said, "To live is to choose but to choose well you must know who you are and what you stand for. Where you want to go and why you want to get there".**

**Well, we can all answer the last part of that quote with the same answer. We are all hoping to have a place in God's Kingdom. We are looking for the Lord**

**Jesus Christ to return and set up the Kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital and rule the world in righteousness. We are looking for a part in that government – a place as Kings and Priests – immortal, gifted with energy and wisdom so that we can be his helpers and guide people in this new order of things.**

**We need to start to picture ourself there. Picture the Kingdom. Make it real.**

**So now we need a plan. How can we get there? What do we need to do now? The way leading to eternal life is the way of living in the boundaries of God's word. Our attitude has a lot to do with that, so what makes our attitude? Our attitude is affected by the Spirit Word working on our minds. The word of God has the power to change our lives. Regular reading of the word can change those neural pathways and helps us to create new behavior and thought patterns and change our attitude.**

**Have a look at Hebrews 4 verse 12. Turn with me and let's read it. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart".**

**The word "quick" has the idea of something "living". And it is "powerful" has the idea of "energetic".**

**It is something powerful to change our lives. It can cut through the nature of each of us. Right through to the marrow where the corpuscles are formed, the very source of our life blood. Not only that, it can discern our very thoughts and motives. That's a power!**

**So, we can see it can change our lives. This will help to change our character, not in an instant but in small steps, one at a time. Without a change of the mind and character there will be no change of our bodies.**

**Let's work on that this year to read more of God's word. Maybe we can set aside a regular time. It's been proven that the morning is the most impressionable time before our mind becomes filled with the busyness of our daily lives. We can double the benefit allowing some time to meditate on what we have read. Psalms 119 verse 97, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day".**

**Well, we know it is not practical to actually make that our goal for the whole day. But we know the day is filled by moments, so let us take a moment out of our days to reflect on divine things. The other great power in our lives is prayer.**

**It is such a good thing to start our day with prayer to thank our God for His care and to confess our weakness and to ask for His help during the day.**

**It will be a great source of strength and comfort. Ask those older ones here. It will prepare you for the day. But don't just pray at the start of the day, stay connected throughout the day. Be aware of God's overwhelming care. 1 Peter 5 verse 7: "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you". Jesus taught that men ought always to pray. In Luke 18 verse 1 he taught his disciples to pray always.**

**Let's make the most use of this power in the new year. I have heard of people who keep Prayer Diaries and they have been amazed how so many of their prayers have been answered. They do that so they can remember to thank their Heavenly Father and not let it slip their minds, when sometimes life can be busy and at a fast pace.**

**Well, what about thankfulness. Let's be more determined to be grateful in an age where there is so much complaining. And really complaining about what! We don't live in a war-torn country where our lives are at risk. We don't go to bed hungry nor do we face torture or imprisonment for our beliefs.**

**Let's get things into perspective and learn to be more grateful for what we have. 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 18, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, concerning you".**

**Let's all reach out to others. Make an effort to connect with our brothers and sisters. Get to know them so that when they face trials and difficulties you can share their burden and be there to help to build them up. Every day gives us opportunities to practice this. This is the fruit of the Spirit in action. Galatians 5 verses 22-23, "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law".**

**Growing from this will be the development of an attitude of service. There are so many jobs to be done – be a willing helper. Always keep in mind that this is a day of opportunity. Christ gave us the supreme example. He gave his life for us. Galatians 6 verse 9, "And let us not be weary in well doing for in due season we shall reap if we faint not".**

**Stop wasting energy beating ourselves up or letting other people's opinions affect us. Don't let other people's opinions become our reality.**

**The brain doesn't need any help in giving us destructive thoughts about ourselves – just look at weeds. They don't need any help to grow – they will grow anyway even in cracks in footpaths. But if we want good thoughts, just like roses to grow, they require an enormous amount of consistent effort to thrive, the same is for our thoughts.**

**So, on a personal level let's have an honest look at ourselves. Let's stop making excuses!! We need to constantly examine ourselves and see where we can improve ourselves. Let's work on our personal defects, and we all have these. Laziness, impulsiveness, greed, selfishness, pride, anger, etc. Let's set ourselves high personal standards and improve our characters.**

**Now don't expect change to come easily. Making the decision to change is easy but bringing this to pass is not going to be easy. We live in an instant age. You know there is instant everything. This is not what it is going to be like. It's going to need time and patience to achieve anything in life. It's no different when we decide to change.**

**We will have failures, that's for sure but it is all about direction. Keep on track. Failures are part of life. If you don't fail you don't learn. If you don't learn, you'll never change.**

**So, what are we going to do? What we do is a direct result of how we are thinking. So let's change our thought patterns by:**

- 1. Reading God's word and meditating on it.**
- 2. Pray lots.**
- 3. Be there ready to serve and look after one another with love and care.**
- 4. Have a vision of the Kingdom.**
- 5. Have a list of our aims.**

**So now as we turn to the emblems before us, to break bread and drink wine in memory of our Lord and unite in thanksgiving and prayer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us use this opportunity to examine ourselves and set ourselves goals for the new year.**

**Psalms 90 verse 17, "And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it".**

**"Even so, come, Lord Jesus".**

## **EXHORTATION: OVERCOMING DEPRESSION**

**We all come here Sunday by Sunday and we see the familiar faces of our brethren and sisters. We all smile and welcome each other, but do we know how some of us have endured the week?**

**Are we on the lookout for signs that all is not well so that we might be the best contact that a person has had all week.**

**Do you know that I'm not the only exhorter today, but Hebrews 10 verse 25 tells us that we are "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching". So, we all have a part to play today, encouraging one another.**

**We are living in the last days. Paul describes them in 2 Timothy 3 verses 1-5, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good. Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."**

**What a list. It sure isn't nice and this is our society. Living in this type of society is sure to affect us all in some way, don't you think? Positive or negative.**

**So today I want to have a look at one of the negative sides to stress, that being depression. We will look at some examples in the Bible and try to take some of the positives out of their trials, to help us in our walk today.**

**Depression is not something that only affects people who are spiritually weak although that can contribute to the outcome, but people who feel burdened and over-whelmed.**

**We are going to see that it is not a new thing. In James 5 verse 10 we read, "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience".**

**Well let's take an example we all know well, Elijah. Let's have a look at 1 Kings 17 verse 1, "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word".**

**He bursts on the scene in the court of Ahab and fearlessly delivers his message and goes. Then in 1 Kings 18 verses 19-21 he challenges the prophets of Baal and turns the nation around.**

**So, what happened then? 1 Kings 19 verses 1-2, “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time”.**

**So, what does Elijah do? We see in verses 3-4, “And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers”.**

**What brought about this change of attitude, for that is what it was. It was actually a wrong perception. He saw himself as a total failure yet the nation had just repented on Mount Carmel. He felt that hopelessness that comes about from depression.**

**So, he lay down and slept – a common response to something too hard to handle. So how does the loving Heavenly Father deal with this?**

**Well, He doesn’t tell Elijah to “snap out of it and pull yourself together”, but He sends an angel to look after his physical needs. 1 Kings 19 verses 5-6, “And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again”.**

**At Horeb God manifested his power in the wind, earthquake and fire causing Elijah to take cover in the cave. What a powerful God, and Elijah fears Jezebel!**

**But then God gently draws him out with the still small voice.**

**“What are you doing here Elijah”? verse 9.**

**What is Elijah’s answer? Verse 14, “And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away”.**

**But that wasn't really true. That was his wrong perception, and he is told to go back. God gives him a list of things to do.**

- 1. Verse 15, "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria".**
- 2. Verse 16 - next anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as the next king of Israel.**
- 3. And anoint Elisha to be prophet in thy room.**

**Elijah had forgotten about the 7,000 who had not bowed their knee to Baal in verse 18. So, what was the result as he worked through his list? His focus shifted from himself to the task in hand, and slowly he moved out of his limbo state.**

**What about Job. If ever a man had cause to feel depressed and sorry for himself, it was Job. Can you ever read the story and not feel sorry for this man. It was not just material loss that he suffered in Job 1 verses 13-19, but also his health in Job 2 verse 7. The loss of all these things; it seemed as if God had forsaken him.**

**He was trying to live a godly life. It made him feel depressed and made him wish he could die. Look what his friends did. They came and visited him and were so shocked at how he looked that they cried and didn't say a word for 7 days and 7 nights. They were just there for him. Then they each put forth their reason for Job's suffering. All incorrect, and finally silenced by God. Job prays for his friends who at times had hardly seemed as friends, and Job is restored to health and his position - Job 42 verses 10-17.**

**Let's have a look at Solomon. He writes a complete book on his efforts to get the fullest possible joy out of life. Yet Ecclesiastes is really a sustained declaration of frustration. For, this king who had everything that men long for - riches, fame, respect, honour, blessings from God - finds himself empty.**

**So, when things seem to go wrong, how do you feel? Do you feel abandoned by God or can you see the bigger picture that God is working on you to see how you will react.**

**The psalmist tells us in Psalms 94 verse 12, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law".**

**Well, for that to happen it is necessary for us to pick up our Bible and read the Scriptures. Not easy when you feel discouraged and feel that God has forsaken you.**



It has been said, “There will be no coming out of the depths as long as we prefer to be in them”. How strange that human nature makes it possible to actually prefer a terrible way to a joyous outgoing one! It seems ridiculous that people could even think like that. But you know staying in a depressed, miserable state is easier for some people than making an effort to get out of it and effort is required.

We need goals for what they can lead us to achieve, they also add order, system and focus to our lives. Your goals will be short lived, unless they are permanently set down for on-going attention. So here are a few hints on writing down our goals.

**1. CHOOSE YOUR GOAL**

**Base it on your current awareness of your purpose or mission.**

**2. MAKE IT REALISTIC AND ACHIEVABLE**

**Can I see myself achieving this? (If not, you will release no energy towards the goal).**

**3. MAKE IT SPECIFIC**

**Specify by how much and when, etc.**

**4. MAKE IT CHALLENGING**

**Aim high. Extend yourself to make it worthwhile. Don't aim so ridiculously high that it becomes unrealistic for you.**

**5. CONSTRUCT THREE TIME FRAMES**

**Long term goals**

**Medium term goals**

**Short term goals**

**Set your goals down in bite-size chunks so that you can plan your progress.**

So, in our lives, there are times we all lose our way and you must admit trouble is one sure way of drawing us back to God.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5 verses 6-7, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”.

Being brought low helps us to see that the thing is too big for us. We feel helpless and turn to God and in that state of mind, God is only too willing to



**help, for as God has promised us in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”.**

**However, as humans we like to have our problems removed but often are not willing to change.**

**So, what is the answer? Even the world acknowledges that to manage despair and hopelessness, is a bit like a baby learning to walk. One tentative step at a time, one day at a time.**

**You can use God’s solution with Elijah – make a list of things to do or goals and pray for God’s strength to do them.**

**So, we can see that the Bible has all the answers. All we need to do is pick it up and read it.**

**None of our problems will disappear instantly, but when complete trust is placed in God we will grow in the conviction that God is caring for us in all our difficulties.**

**Philippians 2 verse 13 tells us that God is at work “both to will and to do of his good pleasure”.**

**So, do we really believe it?**

**Let us pray as Paul did in Ephesians 3 verses 14-21, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the ecclesia by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen”.**



## **EXHORTATION: SAMSON – FORGIVENESS AND CONSEQUENCES**

**For many of us the unusual circumstances we live in have caused many of us to feel over-whelmed by failure and a fear of judgement to come, so today I thought it might be a good time to take a look at, and to find comfort and strength, for all who may feel like this.**

**Today is a good time to be honest with ourselves. Now we know this isn't as easy as it sounds, as we know that the heart is deceitful above all things and even in self-examination, we have to be careful. It is this self-deception that can sometimes be the cause of feeling a sense of hopelessness and disappointment with life and failure.**

**To find peace we have to learn to allow God to work in our lives – He is the potter – He can shape our lives and give us the confidence to face the future. We will fail at times, but let's accept this as a reality and ask for forgiveness and move on.**

**This morning is a good opportunity for this self-examination. Today let's take a look at the life of Samson and see how circumstances and failures and frustrations in his life still brought him to the point of being listed in Hebrews 11 in the honor roll of the faithful. Imagine if we had written this record, would we have placed him there? Would we have included him with men like Abraham, Moses and David? We would have thought – no way, and listed all the reasons why not. But yes, he is there, in verse 32.**

**Hebrews 11 verse 32: “And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets”.**

**So, for those who may feel a failure and think that maybe God can't work with them or forgive them for their hopeless attempt at living the truth, let's have a look at Samson's life a little closer and be encouraged by it. God is in control. He is working out His purpose in our lives even when we fail. Samson's life demonstrated God's ability to use our mistakes and our failing to fulfil His purpose. So, why was Samson included in Hebrews 11 in the honor roll of the faithful, when his life seemed to be an episode of disobedience and stubbornness and failure. Well despite all his failures God didn't give up but continued to work in his life until the end.**

**Samson's name means “brilliant sunlight”. He was miraculously conceived after an angel appeared to his mother.**

**Judges 13 verse 7: “Behold thou shalt conceive and bear a son and now drink no wine or strong drink neither eat any unclean thing for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death”. They are pretty clear instructions. In verse 5 his mission was clearly stated – he was going to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines who were oppressing Israel at that time. Let’s read verses 24-25, “And the woman bare a son and called his name Samson and the child grew and Yahweh blessed him. And the spirit of Yahweh began to move him at times in the camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.**

**So far all seems to be going well. His mission was to “deliver Israel from their enemy the Philistines”, so what was he thinking when in chapter 14 we read “he went down to Timnath”, enemy territory. It’s repeated in verse 5, “then went Samson down”. Verse 7, “he went down”; verse 10, “his father went down”. It was a dangerous move. It started a downward spiral for him as he saw an attractive Philistine woman (verse 1) and wanted her for his wife (verse 2). He was warned by his parents in verse 3 but he didn’t listen and answers with a “get her for me, for she pleases me well”. She looked pretty good to him – “she is right in mine eyes”. Sometimes what looks good to us may not in fact be good. In this case it was not good.**

**It was not going to be a good outcome, when she betrays him in verse 17 telling the riddle answer to the children of her people. Where was the loyalty to Samson? The result was 30 Philistines died; she and her father’s house were burned, and in Chapter 15 another 1,000 Philistines died. God was still using Samson to fulfil His purpose despite his wrong doing.**

**We’ve got to realize that God can use our mistakes and he will never leave us or forsake us. We might be battered and bruised and fall down at times from our choices but we will learn a few lessons along the way. It may be that it will take us a few mistakes to learn. So in times of difficult situations we need to try not to fall into a heap of self-pity with a “why me” attitude, but rather “what can I learn from this”, and let our mantra be “this too shall pass”. Maybe our choices are the cause of our pain and suffering as in Samson’s case.**

**The aim is to remain faithful and patient – down the track of life we will see sometimes why things happen the way they did. Maybe we will have to wait until it’s revealed to us at the Judgement.**

**We all have freedom of choice but we are not free from the consequences of our choices. Just like Samson we can choose to obey God or not. But there will**

**be consequences. God can forgive our foolishness if we repent, but the consequences remain.**

**Samson could have chosen a different path, one faithful to his Nazariteship, but he didn't. He continued on his self-destructive path.**

**One of the sad parts as well is that others get hurt too. It's one of those things we must weigh up. Is it worth it? Or even the possibility of loss of eternal life. How will it affect our family, ecclesia and those around us? Always remembering we have the freedom to choose, but we don't have the freedom to escape consequences.**

**There was a lot of suffering that occurred through Samson going down. So, did he learn? Well, he was struck by the Philistine women, and he continued to pursue them until he was reduced to a slave.**

**Samson was such a strong man we all know that about him. He had super-hero strength – he could tear a lion in half. You only have to look at a lion alongside a man to realize what an amazing feat of strength that is.**

**It is highly unlikely even the strongest of men could survive a fight against a lion. It has been said that a lion strikes with a force equivalent to half a ton. They weigh around 190-200 kgs and have a bone crunching bite force of 1,000 psi. Their fighting capabilities are strong, and they usually spend their life time fighting off rivals, often to the death. They are very agile and love to stalk and ambush their prey.**

**Samson single-handedly killed 1,000 Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass, and in the end he destroyed a massive temple full of Philistines by leaning on the pillars of the temple.**

**We all know that his strength came from God and not because of his long hair. God wanted him to use his strength – his unique strength to liberate Israel from the oppression of the Philistines.**

**God has given each of us unique strengths. We must never, never make the mistake of thinking that we have nothing to contribute. In an ecclesia many people are needed to contribute in so many ways. Sometimes the smallest things can make a big contribution if we pool together.**

**So how did Samson's life end? How did his name get into the honour roll of the faithful? He lived in an era of history when everyone did "right in their own**

eyes”. We saw this in the words Samson used in Chapter 14 verse 3, “get her for me, for she is right in my eyes”.

Samson was physically strong. He was morally weak and the sight of his eyes led him astray. When he broke his vow and his hair was cut and the Philistines gouged out his eyes, (which sounds awful and I’m sure was painful) the strong man who was spiritually weak now became physically weak. The strong man who was blinded by what he saw now became a slave grinding corn and he was in a prison. He now spent his days in darkness, walking around in circles grinding corn – seeing nothing. Not distracted by the sight of his eyes but now able to see his ways. At last he got it – he was supposed to deliver Israel from the Philistines, and notice his hair began to grow. At last he could see that his strength came from God for the purpose of delivering Israel. Look at his prayer in Chapter 16 verse 28. Let’s read it. “And Samson called unto Yahweh and said, O Lord Yahweh, remember me I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes”. Did God hear his prayer?

Judges 16 verses 29-30, “And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood and on which it was borne up of the one with his right hand and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines, and he bowed himself with all his might and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more that they which he slew in his life”.

Samson who spent so much time with the enemy now dies with them because at this moment his prayer shows us he finally realized what his true mission was and wanted to destroy the enemy. And that’s why he is named in Hebrews 11 as an example of those who “out of weakness were made strong” - verse 34.

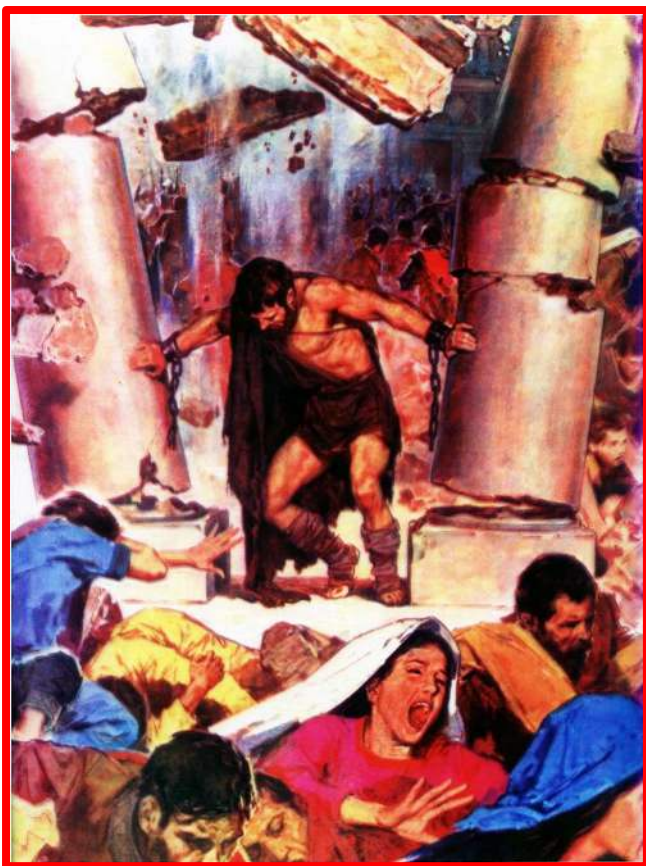
So, no matter how far we think we are gone or what we have done – all of us are only one heart-felt prayer away from experiencing God’s love and forgiveness and acceptance. Today let us all have a really good look at ourselves and use the time we have left, however long or short to turn around our lives, and try to do better in our service for God. Looking at the example of the Lord Jesus Christ who was separated from the womb with an important task to perform – his mission was to save his people from their sins. He had to be a strong man obeying his Father and remaining sinless. He knew the temptations were great, but he realized where his strength lay and leaned on his Father by opening his ears to His Word every day. In his death he destroyed the enemy and because of that, if we follow his example of faithfulness we too can have

**our name in the honor roll of the faithful. And as we now come around the emblems to remind us of the savior of the world, God's own son who gave his life that we might live, let us draw near in reverence and respect for our God and serve Him in reverence and godly fear knowing that our God is also a consuming fire to those who ignore Him and His commandments. Let us examine our lives and hold fast to our faith and learn from the lessons of the past and examine our lives that we might be faithful servants of God we serve.**

**Samson the strong man deceived by what he saw, ended his life with the Philistines. However, the next thing for him will be to awake and leave his grave, now able to see with the clearest vision like a morning sunlight, and will shine like the stars forever and ever and become a "brilliant sunlight".**

**Psalms 28 verse 7, "Yahweh is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth: and with song will I praise him".**

**Philippians 1 verse 6, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ".**



**Judges 16:30 - "And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."**

## **EXHORTATION: THE POWER OF WORDS FOR LIFE AND DEATH**

**I'd like to start this morning with a story. And the story goes like this. There was a group of frogs travelling through the woods one day and two of them fell down a pit, a deep pit and all the other frogs gathered around the pit to see what had happened to their friends. When they saw how deep the pit was they told the unfortunate truth and circumstances to the trapped frogs that they were never going to get out. It was too deep and they did not know what to do, but the two frogs ignored the comments and of course tried to jump out of the pit. The other frogs at the top kept jumping and yelling telling them to stop and pretty much said "you're as good as dead", and finally after a dozen attempts or so to try and jump out of this deep pit – one of the frogs took heed of the words and simply gave up and died, and the other frogs at the top continued to jump around once again yelling at the survivor to stop for the pain and suffering and just give up, stop and die. But seeing his friends jumping and yelling, the last frog jumped even harder and harder, finally he made it out. The other frogs asked him "why did you continue to jump – didn't you hear us?" The frog explained that he was nearly deaf and thought that they were encouraging him the whole time.**

**This story teaches us that the tongue, the spoken word has the power of life and death. Encouraging words to someone can lift them up; it can help them through their day. On the other hand, a destructive word can cause them to give up and quit. Anyone can speak words that rob another of the will to continue through difficult times, but it takes a special individual who will take the time to encourage another one.**

**So, Jesus said "by thy words thou shalt be justified and by words thou shalt be condemned" - Matthew 12 verse 37. If this is the case, how important is it that we should be careful with what we say.**

**Of course, myself included, there is probably not a person in this room who hasn't at one time said something that they wished that they hadn't said, but the words are out there and they continue to inflict damage, hurt and can also continue to hurt the person that said them with regret, saying the things they have said.**

**The words that we use have tremendous power. Proverbs 18 verse 21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" which is what we have seen in that short story.**

**Jesus spoke plainly about how idle words, careless and useless words, that there would be an accounting for in the day of judgment. We would expect our Lord to condemn profane and vile language which we hope we try not to use, but idle words, those that we say carelessly when our tongue is not in gear with our brain are often things we say without concern for the impact on others. We might say, “Really” – yes, we quickly assume that sins of the tongue are minor sins – sins that God may overlook. But no, Jesus is fully aware of the devastating nature of words.**

**Words can build up or they can rip down and destroy, they can motivate or discourage. Words can influence others for good and for bad. How many people do you know who have been disillusioned by careless words spoken and how many have you seen encouraged by words spoken with love and care in difficult times.**

**Unkind words once spoken cannot be taken back and go on causing hurt and damage, and sadly for some people for the rest of their lives. Of course, in ecclesial life often we can become too familiar with each other and say unhelpful things.**

**Let us be determined to think a lot more before we speak. There used to be a saying in our house when we were much younger, “If you can’t say something nice then don’t say anything at all”. Sometimes it might be best not to say anything at all.**

**We can see that with Job and his friends – they came and sat with Job. Job 2 verse 13, “So they sat with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one said a word because they saw how great his suffering was”. Their mere presence was more comforting to him rather than their words of advice later on.**

**The words we speak have emotional potency. Each word we use has a great impact, a power for good and bad.**

**So, we need to choose the words we speak carefully, because they have of course the potential of accomplishing nearly anything or destroying anything.**

**Just one negative comment can ruin a person’s day and a few might even have a negative effect on someone’s life.**

**Of course, on the flip side, one positive encouraging comment can be just enough to make a difference in a person’s life. And we will never really know.**



**We tend to overlook the small things in life, but of course just as small things can lead to present success, the same is true of producing lasting results.**

**In James 3 verse 2, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body”.**

**So today I thought we could examine ourselves, think about how we speak. How our words have the power either to build up or to destroy. And of course, none of us want to be in the destroy category.**

**The word of God stresses that what we say is a gauge of what is in our heart. So, what is in our heart – words of blessing and encouragement for others?**

**Let’s have a look at Proverbs 16 verse 24, “Pleasant words are as honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones”. We all know the healing power of honey. Honey of course has antioxidants, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory properties; it can be used as wound dressing and of course promotes rapid improved healing.**

**Is this the type of words we want to use? When people are going through difficult times do we provide peace and comfort by the words we use or do we add to their trials?**

**Let’s be like the virtuous woman who “opened her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” - Proverbs 31 verse 26.**

**Do we share the wonderful hope of the future with those around us? We have words of life to share. Do we pray for others – we all know the power of prayer and how powerful it is. Do we pray for our brethren and sisters? Do we pray for the sick; do we pray for the lonely; do we pray for the sad? These are all indicators of a healthy state of heart. Now of course when we talk of this – this is not referring to the organ that pumps blood around, although it is a good thing to have a healthy heart, but when we are talking about this we are talking about the core essence of a person. The way you speak and your attitude or tone reflects the person you are and it affects everyone and impacts those around you. A person speaks many words a minute and some can speak up to 7,000 in an hour. Imagine how many words the average person speaks in a day. And when you stop and think how would your words be described for the day – caring, nurturing, loving, wise, gentle or hurtful, unkind, destructive and simply not helpful?**

**James 3 verse 10 says, “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing”, and we shouldn’t be like that. Now lets us have a look at how words are described in the Bible.**

**They are described as “swords” - Proverbs 12 verse 18. In the Psalms like “weapons”. Now we all know that swords and weapons are for war and destruction. They wound and maim; they cause injury, and of course they cause death. Not a good use of words.**

**In the Psalms they are called “arrows and razors,” also destructive, and hurtful, “cutting and hurtful”. They are also called “deadly poison” and “snake venom”. Now we all know about this, living in Australia, how without quick action when bitten by a snake will almost guarantee death and much pain. Let’s not forget James 3 verse 6, “and the tongue is a fire.....and setteth on fire the course of nature”. We know the devastating effect of bushfires on plants and animal life; property and lives, and the contamination of waterways, and of course air quality.**

**Now all of us here, including myself, have the capacity of using the tongue in this destructive way. So, we can see that speaking negatively is very costly in the spiritual realm. Watching what we say and thinking about the effect of our words can bring great reward for all. If we guard our speech, we can win great victories not only for ourself but together our words can be kind, full of love and our actions and words spoken with gentleness, peace and self-control demonstrating love, even in the midst of our enemies. And I stress that we should never let an opportunity pass to say a kind word to or about someone. Give praise and encouragement for we all need help to improve.**

**So let us turn to our reading this morning Proverbs 10 and we will have a look at the seven characteristics of the lips of the righteous.**

**So let us see what it means to use positive and gracious words that heal and help others on the path of life.**

**Verse 6 tells us that “blessings are on the head of the just, but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked”. We have to ask ourselves which one do we want to be.**

**Chapter 10 is a group of proverbs that are relevant for all people. It contrasts the wise son with foolish ones; the diligent with the lazy and the discerning wise words with foolish chatter – a mouth that leads one to life and one that leads to death. So let us take a look at a few of these verses. Both verse 8 and verse**

**10 mention the “chattering fool”. The NIV has “prattering fool”. We have all seen people like this. Constantly speaking empty words which sometimes can end up being quite annoying. It also seems like you can’t have three seconds of silence, they’ve just got to say something.**

**It used to be said “an empty vessel makes the most sound”. So let us not be noted for our much speaking. And verse 11, “the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life” – why? Because they speak godly wisdom that can give the righteous advice on the path of life.**

**Verse 12, “the fool shoots off his mouth and brings ruin to himself”. We need to think much and speak little and always think before we speak, if not we place ourselves alongside the foolish.**

**Verse 18, “he that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool”. So, it speaks here about lying, gossiping, pretending friendliness, betraying someone’s trust, by gossiping about a person, or persons. A person in this category is a fool because no good will ever come from this behavior.**

**Verse 19, “and in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin; but he that refraineth his lips is wise”. A wise person uses his words wisely. They may be few but they are powerful, why? Because they have been thought about before they have been spoken, and sometimes it is best just to listen, and not to say anything. This echoes in Ecclesiastes 3 verse 7 where it says, “there is a time to talk”.**

**Verse 20, “The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth”. The words of a righteous person are valuable, they are like silver. Poor advice is totally worthless. It is easy today to get an opinion – everyone has an opinion but it is not often helpful or wise counsel. Proverbs 25 verse 11, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver”.**

**Verse 21, “The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom”. The lips of the righteous feed with the bread of life, shepherd and instruct. They are helpful and nurture others on the path of life; however, fools lead others on the path to death.**

**Verse 31, “The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out”. The mouth of the righteous increase wisdom in others and the end result is life eternal. They know what to say but the wicked only speak what their natural mind dictates and the end of that will be death.**

**So we can see that every time we speak there are huge consequences and it may only be a few words that are spoken.**

**Our attitude determines the outcome. We need to watch our thoughts as they lead to our attitude. We need to watch our attitude as it leads to our words. We need to watch our words as they lead to our actions and we need to watch our actions as they lead to our habits. And we need to watch our habits as they form our character. And we need to watch our character because it will determine our destiny.**

**So today we have talked about something small but one of the most powerful things in creation. As we know James 3 likens the tongue to a bit in a horse's mouth. A bit is so small but can move an animal 1,000 times its size. James also likens it to a "rudder on a ship" and once again the rudder is so tiny compared to the huge ship that it steers. If anything, James perhaps underestimates the power of the tongue. With a few remarks we can change a person's day, a week, or even a life. Now as we come to the emblems, let us remember the greatest example we have been given of our Lord who spoke with authority yet care and kindness to his mother even in the midst of suffering and what about the comments of the two on the road to Emmaus whose hearts burned within them as he opened up the Scriptures. Let us try to be more like this.**

**And let the psalmists words be our advice in the coming days. Psalm 19 verse 14, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Yahweh, my strength, and my redeemer".**

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## **EXHORTATION: THE RACE OF LIFE**

**We have all just had another Prize-giving night. The end result of another year of Sunday School.**

**Time and effort put in for the prize at the end. It made me think of the race of life and how we are all heading to the finishing line and for the prize of eternal life.**

**Every race has a start; a set course and a goal – the finishing line. With every race the participants need to register to take part. No one can be in the race without registering. So how do we register in this race of life, for we all want to take part. Well, we all have when we were baptized.**

**At the starting line the runners all begin with that keen enthusiasm and freshness with their goal and focus on the finishing line. The secret is to maintain that to the end.**

**The runners line up – they are all shapes and sizes all ages and they are off.**

**This is a long race not a short sprint. The track is cross country. There are obstacles along the way - challenges to overcome. Sometimes the finishing line seems to disappear as we hit a low spot but we just have to keep going in the right direction.**

**In this race everyone is eligible for the prize. You just have to finish it. Some allow distractions to hinder them and others give up. 1 Corinthians 9 verse 24 tells us that we all need to give it our best shot to receive the prize as with all races there are those on the side-lines cheering us on. Hebrews 12 verse 1 tells us they are the heroes of the past who have run the course and know the challenges of the race – the cloud of witnesses. So, what do these witnesses see as they watch the race?**

**Well, there are quite a few running with back-packs – really trying to run with a back-pack! That’s going to make it harder and slow them down. What have they got in their back-packs that is weighing them down? As we journey on the path of life we are going to pick up things that will hinder us. We will pick up “cares of this life”. This can be anything from health issues, to family matters; job worries; in fact, anything that takes away our focus from our goal. Now some of these things can be legitimate and responsible problems but when undue time is spent worrying about them they become unnecessary weights and drain our energy. O that we could unload our burden and take it to God in prayer and accept the outcome.**

**Another load prevalent in our Western society is the deceitfulness of riches – now that can be an accumulation of money or even the things money can buy. They can become a motivating force detracting from the path ahead. Why are they deceitful? Well, they will never satisfy – there will never be enough things that we want. There will never be enough money. O that we could be grateful for what we have, “and having food and raiment” be content with that – 1 Timothy 6 verse 8.**

**Well, there are some other runners who have forgotten to take their water bottle – how are they going to last the distance? The water of the Word and daily reading is so essential. Without it we will become faint and weak.**

**Another runner is distracted by the scenery and even deviating from the course, to take a little time out. And the track alongside looks so much more interesting.**

**And there is another runner so busy checking out all the other participants that he has tripped and stumbled and caused others to slow down. Fortunately, another kind runner has helped him up.**

**In this race of life we have a duty of care to other runners. We are not checking out others to compare ourselves but keeping an eye on them to help them along the way. Actually, a strategy that runners use is to pace themselves off an able runner in front of them. A role model so to speak. We all know someone who has lasted the distance in the race of life. They can be older members of the family or in the ecclesia, and of course, the best example of all – the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Who are the runners closest to us? Even the world acknowledges that you can define a person's direction by their closest friends. So, who are our closest friends? Do they encourage you in a positive manner on the path of life? What are their interests? What is their motivation? Are they able to help and encourage you when a problem comes along? It can make a huge difference.**

**So, we have seen some of the challenges of the race. Now let us focus on how we should run the race to receive the goal at the end – eternal life. It is not guaranteed that everyone who starts the race receives the prize – we have to finish it.**

**We all start the race with enthusiasm and excitement focused on the goal. Urged on by the by-standers and looking to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, so grateful that he went before us and made it all possible for us.**

**We all start well hydrated having prepared to enter the race focused on the study of God's Word and focused on the finishing line.**

**Well now if we turn to our reading Hebrews 12 we see how this can help us in our race of life.**

**Hebrews 12 verse 1: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience, the race that is set before us".**

**We have seen who these witnesses are – they are the faithful of past ages urging us on in the race. What, you can't hear what they are saying? – listen. We open the pages of our Bible and we will hear them. They are shouting at us to throw**

**away all those unnecessary things that we have in our lives that are holding us back, weighing us down and making our race more difficult. Throw them aside – you will feel such a relief. It’s bad enough having a nature that is always trying to trip us up, causing us to stumble along the way.**

**Then run with patience – don’t let anything put you off. We made a vow to God at our baptism. We just need to keep going.**

**The course is marked out. Let’s have a look at Hebrews 11 verse 2: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”. We are looking at him intently as the Word tells us. He is the author – the beginning and finisher of our faith.**

**Well, we don’t really look at his shape and figure. But at his character and example. What enabled him to endure the cross and all it entailed? He lived always conscious of his Father and in communication with Him in prayer. We can do no better than to follow his example and listen to our God as He speaks to us from his Word and communicate with Him in prayer.**

**The Lord Jesus Christ focused on the joy set before him. That was what enabled him to endure the cross and all the injustices he had to endure. But look at the result. He is now immortal, sitting at the right hand of the Father.**

**Hebrews 12 verse 3. Let’s read it: “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”. Now here lies the secret. This is telling us something we all know. Don’t be weary and faint in our minds. That’s where the battles are won and lost. Don’t give up. Focus on the goal not on the troubles along the way. Make each day a winning post. We don’t know what tomorrow will bring – so live the best you can every day.**

**Everything is made easier if we have the right mindset. Challenges are overcome in the mind. Daily reading of God’s Word, thinking about it and prayer are absolute essentials – it’s the only thing that keeps us in the right mind-set to succeed.**

**Verses 4-11 deal with the need for discipline in training. Know that it leads to fruit – righteousness.**

**1 Corinthians 9 verses 24-27: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly: but I keep under my body and bring it into subjection”.**

**What is this telling us, but to put our best foot forward with our best effort to receive the prize, and that requires discipline.**

**Hebrews 11 verse 12: “Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees”.**

**Look out for those who are almost ready to drop. Who are worn out – don’t let them fall. A kind and a helping hand could be just what they need to keep going.**

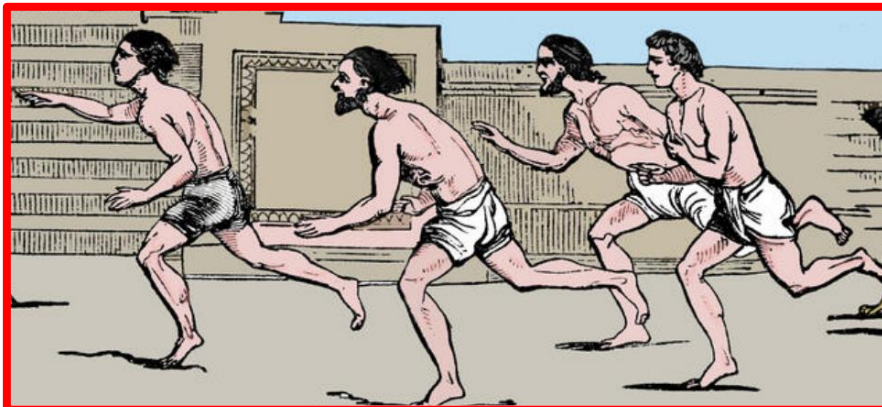
**Verse 13: “And make straight paths for your feet”.**

**It goes without saying that a straight path without obstacles and twists is going to be easier – keep your life simple; uncomplicated, without too many distractions. The journey can be tough, but if we make it to the end it will be worth it a hundred times over.**

**So, let’s run with the intention of winning – don’t be half-hearted or complacent. Be disciplined and self-controlled. And definitely don’t look back, but rather stretch forward toward the mark for the prize.**

**If we do these things in the race of life, we too will be able to say along with Paul, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing”.**

**Now as we take the emblems let’s be more determined to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ who gave his all for us and continue in the race of life, with renewed vigour, and help each other on the way.**





## **EXHORTATION: 1 CORINTHIANS 13 – THE VALUE OF LOVE**

**I recently read an article on “Bad moods are contagious” which I thought might be worth considering today.**

**The article went like this:**

**Happiness is contagious, but so is depression. A new psychiatric study into mind-altering mate-ship proves the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry reports that moods and even mental illness can spread like the flu.**

**Gloom and gladness can infect not only close friends, but “friends of friends”. Depressed people can transmit the blues to colleagues, family, and friends; psychiatrists have discovered.**

**The Flinders University research paper say Psychiatrists should check the social network of depressed patients. If friends or family are depressed this might increase the chance of the patient being depressed.**

**One of the authors said happiness was catching. Happiness does tend to spread through networks. Obviously “birds of a feather do flock together”, but people also become more like each other when they are in a big group. Peer groups among young people are where the influence of friends is at its strongest and there is a group effect.**

**The Professor said people could help fight off depression by making more friends. Having a wider circle of friends is protective – social activity is a good thing.**

**With that article in mind I got to thinking about the importance of the ecclesia in that regard. What a bonus to have ecclesial connections, and, what responsibility on all of us to examine the effect that we have on others. It’s so important for each of us to be a positive influence for good and spend time with the members of our ecclesia. It has been proven that we become like the people we spend our time with.**

**Well, this then puts us at a great advantage being part of a group of people all aiming towards the Kingdom of God.**

**We live in a world that longs for love, whether you’re young or old, single or married, rich or poor. Everyone, everywhere wants to be loved. We need to know that people care about us. That they value and cherish us or simply that we matter. This fundamental need is at the very core of our being. And it starts**

**right when we were babies. Just watch a baby being held by its mother. Inseparable, both mother and child are blissfully content. The bond between them is unbreakable, just as it was in the womb when the baby was attached to the mother by the umbilical cord. In fact, one of the words for “love” in the Hebrew is “ahav” which means “to be attached to”. This attachment to the mother is like her saying to the baby: “I won’t let you go. I will supply your every need. We will always be one”.**

**Brothers and sisters, likewise when you hear the words “God loves you” this means that He attaches himself to you. He will never let you go. He will supply your every need. He will never leave you alone.**

**Too often we are so stressed or discontented that we forget that God is right there beside us, offering His love. We may feel inadequate, lonely or even discouraged and we lose this knowledge that we are loved.**

**So, what a great network of friends we have. There are old, young, peer groups and of course our never tiring leaders who care for our spiritual health. From all these groups of people we can learn something to help us in our walk.**

**We are all different and have different degrees of fruit productivity just like the good ground in the parable of the Sower.**

**Let’s read Matthew 13 verse 23, “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the Word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty”.**

**Well of course we would all like to be the ground that produces one hundredfold but in reality we are not all like that.**

**So, if we did a little survey of what disciples fitted into the one hundredfold category, we would come up with a variety of answers, such as:**

- 1. Maybe they would be the ones that have the truth as the most important part of their life.**
- 2. They walk the talk and show it in their lives that they believe it.**
- 3. Perhaps they would sacrifice self for the good of others.**
- 4. Maybe they would be fantastic Bible students or preach the word to others.**
- 5. Be a positive influence for good on others around them.**
- 6. It could be all these things.**

**One thing it is not, is a competition to be better than your neighbour. After all we all have differing areas where we excel. It's more about doing the best where you can excel. We are all doing it for God.**

**The apostle Paul tells us about the vanity of such an attitude in 2 Corinthians 10 verse 12, "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves. But they measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise".**

**We need to do our service in a spirit of humbleness – do it for the Lord. We can see an example of this in Matthew 25 verses 34-40, "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verity I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."**

**So how do we develop the right attitude to be productive in the truth?**

**Well, let us together, do a little spiritual health check to see how we are going. Is our character being built along the pathway? Are we a positive influence for good in the ecclesia?**

**Let's have a look at our reading today and see if it can help us with it.**

**1 Corinthians 13 verse 1: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal". To have such a showy gift like tongues and speech of angels is all very admirable but without love it is like the booming and clanging of cymbals – jarring and awful.**

**Verse 2, "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith; so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing". Well, this is very spectacular and admirable but we need to know our Bibles. The mysteries are not "who done it" but it is known to those who know the truth – those who have the key to**

**understanding the Bible. And what about faith to remove mountains – I would say that it is not something which would be classed as a minor thing – yet without love you are nothing.**

**Verse 3, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing”. All very admirable things, but without love nothing. All these things in verses 1-3 give an outward show of an admirable person yet the apostle Paul says they are nothing without love.**

**So, we all need this type of love. So how would we define this type of love? The Greek word is “agape” and indicates a selfless concern for the welfare of others, not because of the loveableness of the people, but in obedience to God’s command. It is like the love of Christ manifested on the cross.**

**Now Paul goes on further to the various aspects of this love. Verse 4, “Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up”. So, the idea of “suffereth long” is long-minded or as the NIV has it “patient”. So those of us that have a short fuse, we are not patient. I know we try to make excuses for it like “that’s just how I am; well I’m tired or unwell.” It’s a characteristic we all need to develop. This characteristic shows a person who is slow to anger – is this us?**

**IT IS KIND: We all know what it is to be kind and caring. Are we like this?**

**IT ENVIETH NOT: Well, we know that one of the Ten Commandments was “Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbours”. It is the opposite of “keeping up with the Jones”, always wanting more. It is a problem in our society made worse by advertising. Are we content with what we have or do we always want more?**

**VAUNTETH NOT ITSELF: The NIV has “not boast” – if you have to boast it is usually to put yourself up, and the other side to that is you are usually putting others down. The Proverbs have a good view on this in Proverbs 27 verse 2, “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips”.**

**IS NOT PUFFED UP: NIV has “proud”. Pride is not a good characteristic.**

**Verse 5, “Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil”.**

**DO NOT BEHAVE ITSELF UNSEEMLY:** To be rude and embarrass others with humor at their expense is not acceptable as pain is inflicted even if spoken in a joking manner.

**SEEKETH NOT HER OWN:** NIV has “not self-seeking”. Unlike the world where it’s the other way around and everything revolves around you.

**IS NOT EASILY PROVOKED:** Greek translation is “to sharpen by rubbing”. Have you ever seen someone incessantly annoying someone else until they get punched in the face. Love is not easily provoked.

**THINKETH NO EVIL:** NIV has “keeps no record of wrong doing”. Now this is a characteristic we want. A forgiving nature that doesn’t keep a score card.

Verse 6, “Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth”.

**REJOICETH NOT IN INIQUITY:** Love is never glad when others go wrong. Love is gladdened by good things. The opposite of, “have you heard what brother so and so did?” No, love is not interested in others failures. It’s interested in building up.

Verse 7, “Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things”

**BEARETH ALL THINGS:** To cover the mistakes of others. Doesn’t gossip about others.

**BELIEVETH ALL THINGS:** Always eager to believe the best.

**ENDURETH ALL THINGS:** A military term meaning to keep others on the right track.

Now we are right back to where we started. A positive influence for good on others; helping to keep them on the path to the Kingdom.

We need to be joyful in our worship and in our life in general. God has blessed each of us with the knowledge of His son and His abundant grace and mercy, that we should be counted among the happiest people on earth.

What do people see when they look at us? Do they see an individual who has been transformed into a joyous, thriving human being? Let us together work towards that in the days that lie ahead.

**So, is all of this important? Let's have a look at 1 John 3 verse 18 and we can answer the question ourselves.**

**“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and truth” and 1 John 4 verses 7-11.**

**“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another”.**

**Here was the supreme example of one who encouraged those around him by his steadfast example of good.**

**So, I've made a list that may be able to help us out with building each other up.**

**1. ESTEEM OTHERS HIGHER**

**Leaders esteem others higher than themselves. Have high regards, great respect, and favorable thought of people in your circle of trust and influence. Strong people don't put others down. They lift them up.**

**2. BE WISE IN YOUR SPEECH**

**We need to communicate more effectively by thinking before we speak. If there's a more appropriate way of saying something in a conversation, let's use it. Try and keep it positive.**

**Before we speak (Think): T (Is it TTrue?); H (Is it Helpful?); I (Is it Inspiring?); N (Is it Necessary?) K (Is it Kind?)**

**3. BE ENCOURAGING**

**Encouragement is an expression and assurance of one's hope and future in words presence and genuineness.**

**4. BE QUICK TO FORGIVE**

**When others make a mistake, be quick to forgive and forget; releasing them from guilt and shame that may take root in one's heart when not dealt with over time. Forgiveness doesn't excuse one's behavior. Forgiveness prevents their behavior from destroying your heart.**

**5. BE UNDERSTANDING**

**Wisdom and understanding go hand in hand. Understanding starts by being an active listener. People don't always need advice. Sometimes all they really need is a hand to hold; an ear to listen and a heart to understand them.**

**6. ZERO GOSSIP**

**Never speak of things that cause unnecessary hurt to others by speaking about unclaimed rumors behind their back.**

**If you didn't hear it with your own ears or see it with your own eyes, don't invent it with your small mind and share it with your big mouth.**

**7. SHARE KNOWLEDGE**

**If we find something that has been helpful for us in our walk of life, share it with your friend. It will have immediate application for better results in our lives.**

**"The world is a dangerous place not because of those who do evil but because of those who look on and do nothing" (Albert Einstein).**

**8. STAY HUMBLE**

**Humility and maturity go together. A dignified person accomplishes much but brags little. They are secure in their standing without needing to make noise, often treating everyone with tremendous respect regardless of position.**

**Be strong when you are weak, brave when you are scared and humble when you are victorious.**

**9. BE POSITIVE**

**Positive thinking goes beyond having the drive and motivation for personal success. Build up your loved ones with your positiveness. Allow them to be open for growth in the truth.**

**Choosing to be positive and having a grateful attitude is going to determine how we are going to live our lives.**

**10. LOVE**

**Brothers and sisters, building up a person or persons with the 9 ways mentioned is only ever made effective when done together with love.**

**And now as we take of the bread and wine let us determine in the coming week to show by example that we want to be a positive influence for good.**

## **EXHORTATION: YOU NEVER KNOW – IT COULD BE GOOD OR BAD**

**We are quick to judge things that happen to us and others as either good or bad. But sometimes “bad” things are really “good things” in disguise and things that seem good can bring pain and trouble, down the track.**

**Before we can truly judge something as good or bad, we sometimes need to wait a while to see.**

**I want to tell you a story.**

**There was once a rabbi who had one son. They lived together in a little village and raised horses. One day the son came running into the house, breathless and upset. “Father, Father” he cried. “I accidentally left the gate open last night, and all the horses escaped”.**

**The father barely looked up from the book he was reading. “Could be a good thing; could be a bad thing. You never know”.**

**The next day, the son again ran into his father’s study, this time really excited. “Father, Father, our horses are back and they have brought a herd of wild mustangs with them. And again his Dad replied “Could be a good thing, could be a bad thing. You never know”. The son was surprised at his father’s lack of reaction, but continued working with the animals. A few days later he was thrown while trying to tame one of the wild stallions and broke his leg.**

**Although his son was in pain the father was calm. “Could be a good thing, could be a bad thing. You never know”, he said.**

**The next week a foreign army came into town. They conscripted every able-bodied young man except this father’s son who lay in bed. The soldiers left them in peace. After they had gone, the father went to his son. “You see. Could be a good thing, could be a bad thing, you never know” he said with a smile.**

**So, the next time we are feeling sorry for ourself because something hasn’t turned out how you would like it, remember this story and in the middle of a situation trust in God who is working in your life and whatever happens it could be a “good thing or it could be a bad thing, you never know”. But there will be a day when we review our lives with our angel and then all will be revealed.**

**If things like this happen on a personal level, let’s now extend it to the bigger family, the ecclesia and have a look at some instances of events being bad but**



**turning out for good. Let's have a look at how the truth was spread in the First Century.**

**In Acts 1 verse 8 Jesus told his apostles, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth".**

**So how did this come about? In Acts 2 verse 41, 3,000 were added to the number on the day of Pentecost. Now we look at verse 42 & 43, "and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers", "and all that believed had all things in common".**

**Acts 4 verse 32, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common".**

**Verse 34, "Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them and brought the price of the things that were sold". This worked out as a benefit for all, or did it?**

**In Chapter 5 Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession but kept back part of the price (verse 2). What was a good thing was now a bad thing for them and resulted in their death, but the work continued. Acts 5 verse 42, "And daily in the Temple, and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ".**

**Acts 6 verse 1, "And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Once again a bad thing became a good thing and out of this sprang the idea of spreading the work and delegating: choosing people for specific jobs and involving others - chapter 6 verses 2-5.**

**One of those chosen was Stephen - Acts 6 verses 8-10. Well, his stoning led to the persecution of the ecclesia in Jerusalem - Acts 8 verse 1. Read it.**

**"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the ecclesia which was at Jerusalem and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles".**

**Out of this bad thing the gospel was spread further - a good thing fulfilling the words of Acts 1 verse 8.**

**So, we bring it down to our days because we will also experience the same, could be good, could be bad experiences. The thing is how are we going to react. If in the past things have happened for the furthering of the gospel the challenge for dealing with problems that come our way is that we are all in this together developing our understanding and our characters for the Kingdom.**

**Each of us is unique, and have unique capabilities and talents. Think of what you are good at, what uniqueness can you bring to the meeting.**

**The universe is filled with countless stars; each star has an important place in the universe, they are unique. Like a star, every single person has a special place in this world. Everyone of us, no matter who we are is equally important, simply because we are all a shining star in someone's life and universe and most importantly our own.**

**Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing that it is stupid.**

**Now let's imagine we are a resource pool, a team working together as one, as they did in the early ecclesia (Acts 2 verse 46), "continuing daily with one accord in the Temple" with singleness of heart. They were working together as a team, so we can all tap into the wealth of skills and experiences that each of us has.**

**So let us all try and come up with ideas to improve our ecclesia and to make it a haven where all members want to be there.**

**What about looking to sharing the work load of the many duties to be done in the smooth running of the ecclesia. We have all heard of the saying that "many hands makes light work". Once again team work! We can all do something. Be on the lookout for where you can help and share the load.**

**What about our attitude to each other? Each one is a member for whom Christ died. So, we should treat each other with respect and care. Share our joys and sadness. When issues come, let's always remember it could be good or it could be bad in regards to the outcome. But all working together as a team will always be good for all.**

**We how are we going to achieve this? Why are we all in this together? Let's turn back and have a look at the first century ecclesia and see what united them as one. Let's have a look at Acts 2 verse 42, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers".**

**Now here is the secret. What was the Apostles' doctrine – the command of the Lord was to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”. We all know that the gospel concerns things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. This is our aim and this is our goal. Without the work of Christ there would be no Kingdom for us. We must keep that vision sharp by directing our focus on the Word of God. That is the uniting part – we are all in this together. The challenge is to keep as close to the apostles' doctrine, not the watered down versions floating about today.**

**So, what was the next part? “Fellowship” that is from a word meaning “sharing in common”. Spending time with each other and caring for each other. I know I need to, and all of us need to improve in that aspect.**

**“Breaking of bread” was the next point. The focal point of our time together is just what we are doing today. Assembled round the emblems of our Lord. Remembering our Lord and what he did for us. Examining our lives alongside his. How are we shaping up.**

**And of course, the last aspect “prayer”. I think this is probably the most neglected aspect in today's “rush” way of life. The power of prayer is even recognized by the world. Do you know people who are recovering from illnesses do better if they are prayerful people who believe in God.**

**I'm not talking about miracle healing, but it seems that because these people place their trust in a God, that they recover faster than those who don't.**

**So why do we sometimes neglect the power of prayer? Because often we are so absorbed in the “me”, “my”, “I” syndrome that we fall into a hole of despair and just can't seem to crawl out.**

**Well, we can all recharge our prayer battery starting from today. Make a thankful list and thank God. Think of others who are unwell or struggling and pray for them. Pray for God's Kingdom to come.**

**Now as we focus on the emblems before us, let us compare ourselves to the supreme example who sacrificed his whole life on behalf of us and saw beyond the pain to the joy set before him.**

**And let us all remember that whatever happens, that it could be good or it could be bad, and accept it trusting that our God always knows best.**

## **EXHORTATION: 1 THESSALONIANS 5 – BEING OF THE DAY**

**Let's set ourself a little test this morning. How much do we really wish for the Lord Jesus to return?**

**We all know the benefits it will bring and the great changes that will take place in the earth and best of all bring the Kingdom of God. So, do we really want this?**

**Our readings at the moment are in Thessalonians and the chapter we have had read today gives us time to consider the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Lord who said to his disciples at the feast of remembrance that "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom".**

**In the previous chapter of Thessalonians Paul had written concerning the dead. How comforting are these words even to us when a faithful member dies. Let's read them. 1 Thessalonians 4 verses 17-18, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words".**

**But the question then and now is "when will this happen"? Paul answers this in 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 1, "But of the times and seasons ye have no need that I write unto you". Dates and times were of no importance because they could discourage believers, and they still do. The Lord himself said in Acts 1 verse 7, "It is not for you to know the times or the season which the Father hath put in his own power".**

**Yet if they knew their Scriptures they would know. Verse 2, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night". The thief doesn't send you a message to let you know when he is coming. "I'll be there at 1.00 am Sunday". But rather just when you least expect it he strikes; and usually at night whilst householders are away and sometimes they are sleeping.**

**So, does that mean we will be caught by surprise? In fact, some will be caught unawares. But if we are watching and reading our Bibles, Paul says in verse 4 of this chapter, "But ye brethren, are not in darkness that, that day should overtake you as a thief", whereas in verse 3 it says when "they" shall say. Two different groups of people are referred to. First "ye" referring to the brethren and "they" referring to another group.**

**So, we are not in darkness. What makes us different from those of verse 3? Paul tells us the world lies in darkness but we have the light of God's Word. That's the difference.**

**I want to tell a little story. Recently I was at a fire. When we had a wind change it was coming right at us. Life can be like that, in our case with the fire when it gets that bad we have a saying which is "full left for life". What this does is it puts up a wall of spray in front of you which sucks in clean and fresh air from behind you so you can breathe and see. So, you are able to get yourself out of there.**

**I couldn't help thinking how appropriate that water was. The solution to the problem. And it's the same for the bigger picture in our life. The Word of God is our life saver when we fall into difficulties in our lives.**

**So how do we prepare for the difficulties in our life and be prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ?**

**Let's read verse 8, "But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation". First, I want to have a look at what the NIV says: "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love; as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet".**

**The word "sober" means "self-controlled". So, we need to put on protective gear. Well, the protective gear we need is firstly the breastplate of faith, or as the NIV says "putting on faith and love as a breastplate".**

**1 John 5 verse 4 tells us that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith". Why? Because faith puts reality into the things of the future. What about love? This type of love is selfless and thinks of others' wellbeing first. This is so different to the way the world looks at it, which is to look after number one.**

**And to protect the head – "the hope of salvation". Why? Because no matter how tough things in life might get, God wants to save us (verse 5). Christ died that we might live with him.**

**Let's not be discouraged when the going gets tough. Remember what John said in Revelation 7 verse 14: "These are they which came out of great tribulation". It's easy enough to talk about trials preparing us for the Kingdom of God. But it is not so easy when we are the ones being tested. Sometimes it almost feels**

as if we are drowning in the tears of misery. But we need to be careful and remember the words of Christ concerning some that in a time of temptation fall away. Let us not “lay down the cross” because it is too heavy.

Well, what is the answer when the going gets tough? The words of David might help. He said “from the ends of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed”.

James also says, “Is any among you afflicted, let him pray”, and here in Thessalonians Paul says in verse 17, “pray continually”. God hears our prayers and we will be given strength to endure and a help that will open a way of escape. We will not be tempted above that we are able to bear.

Verse 6, “So then let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled” (NIV).

So, what is this sleep – we all need sleep to restore our bodies and mind, so it can’t mean literal sleep. Let’s think back to our burglar. He comes in the night, sometimes while the homeowner is sleeping unaware of what is happening.

Now continuing on, the figure of day and night now enters into the theme. The day is at hand but not arrived. It is the day of the Lord. It is coming, but is not here. In his absence it is night and because of that an almost universal sleep exists where people are oblivious to the real facts of life, dreaming away. Christ will come and the sad reality will mean desolation for them.

We shouldn’t let ourselves sleep as others do but keep the facts of our situation in our mind – that’s keeping awake. So how do we remain awake? Well, most people today use stimulants like caffeine and V drinks. So, what is our caffeine and V drink? God has provided it to us in his Word together with prayer and the assembling together with our brethren and sisters that share the same hope. We all know how fired up we can be when we have been to a Bible school or a study week and have been sharpened, so to speak by the Word of God.

Well, do we make the most of the word of God? That is the power that will help us overcome the sleep. Unfortunately, in our day with all the exciting and alluring things in the world, the Bible can sometimes seem very dull and we can so easily be sucked in so that our focus is blurred and as in the fire we talk about how we can lose our way temporarily and be lulled into sleep, and will exclude God from the picture.

**If it seems that the way is narrow and the standard high, we need to remember it is God who has made them like that. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 verses 8 & 10, “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light”. “Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord”.**

**Notice “what is acceptable unto the Lord”. So reading that, where does the thinking fit in – ‘God loves you whatever.’ We will never know what is acceptable if we don’t read the word.**

**In our lives it’s easy to become discouraged and disillusioned and give up and opt out which some have done. But soon the fight will be over and the race done.**

**Let’s look at 1 Thessalonians 5 verses 9-10, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him”. That’s getting our focus right. What is the alternative?**

**Let’s do what Paul advises us in verse 11, “comfort yourselves together, and edify one another”. “Edify” means as the NIV has it “build up each other” which we know we are not so good at. We tend to pull each other down a lot.**

**Here’s 10 ways to build each other up:**

**1. ESTEEM OTHERS HIGHER**

**Leaders esteem others higher than themselves. Have high regards, great respect, and favourable thoughts of people in your circle of trust and influence.**

**2. BE WISE IN YOUR SPEECH**

**Communicate more effectively by thinking before you speak. If there’s a word that’s more appropriate in a conversation, use it. Start with a praise.**

**3. BE ENCOURAGING**

**Encouragement is an expression and assurance of one’s hope and future in words presence and sincerity.**

**4. BE QUICK TO FORGIVE**

**When others make a mistake be quick to forgive and forget: releasing them from guilt and shame that may root in one’s heart when not dealt with over time.**

**5. BE UNDERSTANDING**

**Wisdom and understanding go hand in hand. Understanding starts by being an active listener.**

**6. ZERO GOSSIP**

**Never speaking of things that cause unnecessary hurt to others by speaking about unclaimed rumors behind their back.**

**7. SHARE KNOWLEDGE**

**If you find an article or book that's useful share it with your friends. This will have immediate application for better results in our lives.**

**8. STAY HUMBLE**

**Humility and maturity always go together. A dignified person accomplishes much but brags little. They are secure in their standing without needing to make noise, often treating everyone with tremendous respect, regardless of position.**

**9. BE POSITIVE**

**Positive thinking goes beyond having the drive and motivation for personal success. Build up your loved ones with your positiveness, allowing them to be open for growth in the truth.**

**10. LOVE**

**1 Corinthians 13 verses 4,5 & 13: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love never fails. Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love".**

**Brothers and sisters, building up a person or persons with the 9 ways mentioned is only made effective when done together with love. Care for your brothers and sisters how you want to be cared for.**

**Now as we take of the emblems let's think about the things we have considered this morning and in the coming days let's stay awake, douse the haze of the fire with the moisture of the Word and encourage one another.**

**Surely the day is at hand.**

**1 Thessalonians 5 verses 15-18: "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you".**



## **EXHORTATION: THE DUTY AND PRIVILEGE OF SERVICE**

**Another Sunday; a new week, in fact a new year. A chance for a new chapter in our lives, to improve our character and our service as we come here once again around the table of our Lord to remember the sacrifice that he made on our behalf.**

**What a privileged people we are to be called out from the mass of humanity to share in God's Kingdom and glory. Do we really appreciate the enormity of that privilege. It is not really an age of gratefulness and thankfulness.**

**God has called us out and invited us to share in his Kingdom and glory, but we determine the outcome by our appreciation and commitment to serving Him in whatever way we can.**

**We have been given great privileges but with that comes great responsibility. "To whom much is given, much is expected" – Luke 12 verse 48.**

**Well, we are here today to examine ourselves alongside the example of our Lord and not each other.**

**Let's take a look at how the Lord Jesus Christ lived his life. Let's turn to Mark 1. This is just a little snap-shot – a sample of how the Lord Jesus Christ spent his 3 ½ year ministry.**

**The chapter begins with the work of John the Baptist, followed by the baptism and temptation of Jesus. Then his work began. Just look at the record.**

**Verses 14-15      Preaching**

**Verses 16-20      Calling Disciples**

**Verses 21-22      Teaching**

**Verses 23-27      Healing the man with the unclean spirit.**

**Verses 29-31      Healing Peter's mother-in-law.**

**Verses 32-34      Healing the diseased and those with mental illness.**

**Verse 35            Rising early and praying. His secret to success.**

**Verse 39            Preaching**

**Verses 40-45      Healing a leper**

**A tireless worker, and did you note the sense of urgency? Have a look at:**

**Verse 10            Immediately**

<b>Verse 20</b>	<b>Straightway</b>
<b>Verse 21</b>	<b>Straightway</b>
<b>Verse 28</b>	<b>Immediately</b>
<b>Verse 31</b>	<b>Immediately</b>
<b>Verse 42</b>	<b>Immediately</b>
<b>Verse 43</b>	<b>Forthwith</b>

**The Lord Jesus Christ, our example of service, was busy in the things of God. He didn't neglect his duty or leave it to others. He had only 3 ½ years and so much to do. So, he worked hard, leaned on God his Father and went about doing what he could.**

**Are we following his example? Are we eager to help our ecclesia by doing our part faithfully, or do we leave it for others. Which of us knows how much time we have. It is in the small things we are tested to show our love and appreciation for the things of God and carrying out our duties faithfully.**

**When we came out of the waters of baptism we all began a new life in Christ and pledged to follow his example and begin a life of service. We all started out with ideals just as we do on our life's journey. "Ideals are like the stars, we never reach them but like the ancient mariners at sea, we chart our course by them".**

**However, just like a ship at sea, things don't always go smoothly. Our lives in the truth doesn't guarantee a trouble-free life. We are continually being tested and challenged every day. How we react to challenges and choices we make determine whether they have a good or bad outcome.**

**Well, I'm sure in our lives and also in our ecclesial life we have come across some stormy patches. Did this produce growth and have a good outcome or did it discourage us.**

**We are all used to storms; living in this state we all know how destructive and damaging they are. But did you know that they have a good side to them as well. For plants and grass, storms product prolific growth. Lightning super charges plant growth as electrical storms convert nitrogen in the atmosphere into a form that can be absorbed by the plants. It waters and fertilizes at the same time and promotes rapid growth. This is one of the reasons we have to mow our grass so often in the stormy summers.**

**Just like the storms and difficulties in life can also product prolific growth if our attitude is right. Just have a look at people who have tough times. It can have two effects. One, it can cause grumbling in self-pity. The “poor me; no one has it as tough as I do” or it can have prolific character growth and comes out as thankfulness and gratefulness and develops a real care and compassion for others. There is positive growth for some. They developed a true care and concern for others, not self. They had the right attitude.**

**At the end of the day no one has it tougher than our Lord.**

**Let’s examine our lives and reflect and focus on our values.**

**Surely for all of us here today the top priority would be serving our God. Well, we all know we have a chance to improve.**

**Let’s have a look at our reading this morning, Matthew 25, The Parable of the Talents. It exempts no one from contributing. No matter what our ability is we can all do something. Our Lord is just. He doesn’t expect more than we are capable of, but the best of what we can do.**

**Let’s read from verse 14, “For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods”. Now we notice that they were his servants and they had his goods. The outcome was therefore for the benefit of their Lord.**

**Verse 15 “And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey”.**

**So, the test was, what were they going to do with what they were given? They all had something to start with. They could all increase that for their Lord.**

**Verse 16, “Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same and made another five talents”. He didn’t waste time. He was a willing worker. He had a job to do and he got stuck into it and give it 100%.**

**Verse 17, “And likewise he that had received two, gained another two”.**

**Verse 18, “But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord’s money”. What was he thinking! Now he was never going to increase. He was a servant of his Lord, yet he was not serving. Perhaps he felt his one talent was too insignificant, it wasn’t worth the effort. Perhaps he was lazy or too busy doing his own things.**

**Sometimes as individuals we can feel that our contribution is so small that it is not worth it. But it's all about contributing the best you can, it all adds up. And great things can be achieved when all the resources pool together.**

**We have a new syllabus out for the year. Let's all check it out to know when we have a duty to perform. Do we note it down on our phone or calendar or some kind of device, or do we deem service in the ecclesia insignificant?**

**It may seem insignificant but it is service to God. Perhaps we just leave it to the 'someone else can do it category.'**

**Look at what Matthew 25 verse 24-30 says about that attitude.**

**"Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where though hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid they talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth".**

**Now it goes without saying none of us want to fit into that category, but rather into the worker category. Look at verse 21-23. This was said both of the 5 talent man who had increased by labour and gained another 5; and the 2 talent man who had gained another 2.**

**Let's read verse 21, "His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord".**

**Verses 22-23, "He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, though deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter though into the joy of thy lord".**

**A diligent person is like that in all aspects of life – it is in their character. To neglect a duty would just not be a part of their thinking. Because when we neglect on our duties someone else has to step in and that someone is then being burdened with double duties.**

**Let's make this a year of taking responsibility for our duties, to do our part in our ecclesia.**

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### **EXHORTATION: LIVING IN THE MOMENT**

**Here we are once again around the table of the Lord to examine ourselves and refocus as to where we are heading in our lives and how best to reach that goal.**

**Just for a second, I want you to put aside every stray thought, worry or care. Right now, in this moment, where are you? What do you see? What are you feeling? Are you relaxed or are you tense? Are you warm or are you cold? Perhaps you are anxious or worried about something coming up in the future. Or maybe you are focused on the past filled with regrets.**

**When we are tormented by our past and anxious about the future, the present moment is all but ignored or just lost. Distracted by such thoughts as we often are we miss the blessings of the present moment.**

**Have you ever driven on the road and suddenly realized – Wow, how did I get here? And totally focused on where you were and totally unaware of your surroundings. Well, if you have you are not alone there. Just as you change gears automatically without really thinking – you have driven on auto-pilot. You have done all the right things but you really haven't focused. So, in actual fact you were not living in the moment.**

**Unfortunately, some people live a lot of their life in auto-pilot not really focusing on their goals and not really appreciative of the moment or things around them or even other people. I know this is a bad one for me but here is something you can do next time you are out and about, have a look at the number of people texting on their phones while they are with the real deal or even those texting while driving – they are not really focusing on the present, are they.**

**Let's have a look this morning how we can more fully live in the moment in order to stick to our goal – The Kingdom of God.**

**I want to read you a section out of an article in the paper. This is what it said; “Do you get that one hour. Everyone needs an hour every day that is just their’s to themselves, to assess the day, get their act together, shake off yesterday’s gloom and kick start the mind. That one hour is vital”.**

**Well, this is what the world thinks. A good bit of advice. Well today we can all do that. Paul said, “But let a man examine himself”. So, what are we examining? Let’s rein in our minds and focus. It’s so easy for us to switch to auto-pilot, isn’t it. But let’s examine ourselves. Did we spend our past week serving our God? Or has it been another one of those weeks tearing around madly and forgetting about God. Have we thought about others? Have we made time for our daily readings? Have we prayed?**

**It seems to be an age where we hear people say that they are so busy that they just don’t have any time. Funny isn’t it, when we have more gadgets to save us time that generations before never had. Well let’s see if we can buy up some time by focusing on the moments that make up our day to see what we are doing with them. Do you know that in all our days there are beautiful moments but so often we allow them to be drowned out by noise, distractions, and anxious care. So often they slip away, unobserved and unappreciated as we worry about the future and beat ourselves up over the past.**

**We are always doing something and allow too little time for calmness and quiet. Chill-out time does go a long way. We need to take more notice of the present and “take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof”. That was the advice of our Lord in Matthew 6 verse 34. And in Matthew 6 verse 27, Jesus said, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”**

**Do you know that it has been proven that people who live in the moment, or are living in a mindfulness state in contrast to our auto-pilot or mindless state are happier, more exuberant, more empathetic and healthier. Why do you think that is the case? Because they focus on the beauty around them, notice things going on around them and appreciate all the moments in their day.**

**Now let’s have a look at how we can get to be like that. These people are focused and are happy.**

**Let’s start by having a look at our reading, Psalm 1. Notice the heading “The happiness of the godly”. To share in a future godly vision we need to develop a**

**godly mind now, a “godliness which is profitable unto all things having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” – 1 Timothy 4 verse 8.**

**Psalm 1, verse 1: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful”.**

**Look what this man is doing – he is living in a mindful state. He has made a choice. He is not walking in the counsel of the ungodly; he is not sitting in the seat of the scornful. Notice the progression from a walking position to standing then actually sitting.**

**He knows that to walk by, places him in danger, he could end up stopping to see what they are up to and eventually sit and join them. His mind was the key, his thinking shaped his attitude. The human mind is easily tempted, so rather than trying to resist temptation, he avoids people walking in the wrong way. Our conscious mind establishes the goal, but do we really and truly want it. That will determine if we succeed or not.**

**Verse 2, “But his delight is in the law of the LORD: in his law doth he meditate day and night”.**

**Yes, this man really does want it and this is how he is going to focus and get there. He is going to live in the moment. He is mindful. He delights in the law of God. So, he can get the right mind set. He fills his life and mind with positive eternal things. Notice the positive aspects of verse 2, delight in God’s law, meditation, and in verse 3 the resulting fruit he brings forth. He has a productive life. It’s like the old saying “If we don’t change the root, we won’t change the fruit”. So, this verse has echoes of Joshua 1 verse 8, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth but thou shalt meditate therein day and night that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success”.**

**That’s not living life on auto-pilot – scrambling around with no-time.**

**Verse 3, “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in season. His leaf also shall not wither and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper”.**

**Meditation on God’s word is like a source of water to a tree. It grows as its roots drink in the water and as it grows fruit is produced. This tree is lush and green**

**and fruitful because it is near the water. So, what happens to those who don't follow the path of meditation. Let's read verse 4. "The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away". They have no substance, no water but are like husks left that the wind blows away. Devoid of water, living in a mindless state. We all know what the water represents.**

**Verses 5-6, "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish". The ungodly will die eternally.**

**So, what is this meditation? Eastern religions focus on meditation – sitting cross-legged on the floor, eyes shut and removing all thoughts from your mind, which I'm sure would help a bit. But what is true meditation, the type spoken of in this Psalm we have just looked at. The Hebrew words for meditate contain the idea of talking to oneself. Psalms 77 verse 12 gives us an idea. Let's have a look at it. "I will meditate on all thy works and talk of thy deeds". Link it with Psalms 119 verse 15, "I will meditate on thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways". The NIV has "consider your ways".**

**So, we can see it is a mindful thinking of God and His ways and a sort of talking to yourself. It requires time and focusing of the mind.**

**It's a very necessary thing in our day and age. In order to keep our vision we need to develop a godly mind now.**

**Our motivation for the things of God now and in the future begins in the mind – being mindful. Our mindset must then be changed from the natural ungodly state of being at enmity with God to one where we set our affection (literally the mind) on things above not on things of the earth. We do this through the reading and meditation of God's Word.**

**"Seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness" can be forgotten in seemingly more pressing urgent activities of day-to-day life. Now is the time to step back, so to speak, and review our priorities and stand still for a moment in our busy lives and consider our ways.**

**So, what are we going to do? How are we going to live more fully in the present in order to reach our goal – the Kingdom of God.**



**Well, we need to organize our time and have a structured day with well established routines. When routines become habits they become easy to maintain and once in place turning them off requires great effort.**

**What about prayer? We all know that Daniel was known to have a habit of praying three times a day. Let's read it in Daniel 6 verse 10, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime".**

**We have already spoken about meditation and to that we could add a moment to contemplate all things we should be thankful for. We all take so much for granted.**

**What about being mindful of our ecclesial duties. We all have a list that we have been given. Do we put it in a prominent position and mark it on our calendars. We can't just leave duties to the willing workers, we all need to do our part and see it as service to our God.**

**Let's all focus our minds and start to live more mindfully. Every day organize our environment so that temptations are kept to a minimum.**

**Sometimes we carry on as if we have unlimited time to reach our character's potential before Christ returns. But let's remember that we are mortal and not one of us knows what tomorrow will bring. Let's turn off auto-pilot in our lives and live more in the moment.**

**So, I've made 10 dot points to help us all live more mindfully.**

#### **LIVE ON PURPOSE:**

**We have to stop drifting in life, being continually distracted. Don't allow outside distractions or being super busy pull us away from our real goal – the Kingdom.**

#### **MAXIMIZE TODAY:**

**It's God's job to make the day, but it's our job to make the most of it. So, our happiness is a decision. We make that choice to be happy. We need to fill our minds up with the good things God has done for us and stop worrying about the things we don't have.**

### **DON'T BE OFFENDED:**

**Nothing robs us of the present moment like being easily insulted, upset or assuming the worst of intentions. Someone may either purposefully, or inadvertently, say or do something to tick you off. What happens? You feel disrespected and wounded and you end up pulling back from everything and become good to no one in the work. So, we must think very carefully before we lash out with unnecessary words of hurt.**

### **WE NEED TO STOP BEATING OURSELF UP:**

**It seems that we're always beating ourselves about what we have done and what we haven't done and feel uneasy with the trials we go through. It's all there to build our character and it will if we have the right attitude to it.**

### **TRUST:**

**We need to all put more trust in God, that He will take care of our life. I know with myself, all too often I feel like I am the one running my life. It's only God who knows best even when we might not always understand. We should not just turn to Him when times are tough.**

### **BE GRATEFUL:**

**When we live in gratitude, we live in the moment and experience true contentment. Isn't it all too true that we only count our blessings when something goes wrong – someone close gets sick; you lose a job, etc. Suddenly with regret we look back at our past with appreciation and count our blessings after a crisis has passed. Let's focus on doing it now.**

#### **BUILD UP YOUR BANK OF THANKS:**

- 1. KEEP A DIARY.** It's as easy as writing down three things we can be grateful for every day.
- 2. WRITE A LETTER.** Give thanks to someone in your life.
- 3. STORE IT.** Write down something you're appreciative of each day and put it in a jar. After a month open it and read them.

### **READINGS:**

**We need to set a habit of doing the daily readings. We need that water for our tree that we spoke of earlier so our leaves can be lush and so that we can bring forth fruit fit for the Kingdom of God.**

**MEDITATION:**

**We need to meditate on the things of God and the good things God has done for us. We know God has a plan which we know will shortly come to pass. So, we need to stay focused.**

**PRAYER:**

**Communication is a two-way thing.**

**STAY FOCUSED:**

**We need to keep our eye on the prize – the Kingdom of God.**

**Even though there are days we wish we could change some things we must remember there is a reason. The rearview mirror is so small and the windshield is so big where you're heading.**

**And now as we turn to the emblems before us let us focus on our Lord Jesus, the supreme example of mindfulness. His mind was full of the Word of God as he faced his terrible trial living in the moment knowing what lay in front of him. And because he lived in the moment and focused fully, he overcame and because of that we have a hope of sharing eternity with him.**

**Let us examine ourselves as we eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of him. Yesterday is History. Tomorrow is a mystery. And today? Today is a gift. That's why we call it the present.**

**MORE THOUGHTS WRITTEN BY BEN ON THE MIND**

**Our mind is made up of two parts. The conscious mind and subconscious. The conscious mind is the aware part of ourselves and the subconscious mind is the part we are not aware of. Scientists have known for years that the subconscious mind is more powerful than the conscious mind. The human brain can process 400 billion bits of information per second. However, we are only conscious of about 2000 of those 400 billion bits of information. In more simple terms most of the information of reality is processed by your subconscious.**

**Your subconscious mind runs 90% of your daily life. So, in average you are using only 10% of the time with your conscious mind.**

**So, this is where you may have heard the subconscious mind called "autopilot". It's where your mind stacks away all memories, experiences and perceptions and from here come feelings and ideas that rule your conscious self, behavior and mindset.**

**If we want to have more control over our lives or effect change in our lives, we need to acknowledge it. By doing this it will help us become aware of our subconscious behaviors making it easier to control them.**

## **BIBLE CLASS: JOSIAH – 2 CHRONICLES 34**

**We sometimes hear “he was from a good Christadelphian family”, meaning that the goodness is some miraculous gene passed down from generation to generation, or perhaps they have said, “Oh don’t have anything to do with him, you know what his parents are like”.**

**Well tonight we are going to axe those comments. We are going to look at a family who produced one of the greatest reformers in Judah, king Josiah, and just look at his family line.**

**His great-grandfather was Hezekiah and we know what a reformer he was. In the first month of his reign he repaired and cleansed the temple which his father Ahaz had closed. He cleansed the land from idolatry and established priests and Levites in their courses and revived the Passover. Scripture says of him in 2 Chronicles 31 verses 20-21, “And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered”.**

**So did that “good” pass on to his son Manasseh. We could say of Manasseh that he came from a good Christadelphian family. However, we know what the Bible says about him in 2 Kings 21 verse 2, “And he did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh”. He reigned for 55 years, the longest reign of all the kings of Judah. He came to the throne at the age of 12 and set about reversing all the good that his father Hezekiah had done. He even killed thousands of innocent people so that it is said of him, that he filled Jerusalem with their blood. Not a nice man, but he came from a “good” family.**

**He did however repent in his later years and tried to undo the evil. 2 Chronicles 33 verses 12-13;15-16 tell us of this. “And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him: and he was intreated of Him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God. And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel”.**

**“So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead” – verse 20. Amon was so bad that his own servants slew him – how bad do you have to be for that to happen? Verse 25, “But the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead”.**

**Now you could hardly say that Josiah came from a good family, yet he was quite unique among the kings of Israel and Judah, as the only king against whom nothing adverse is recorded.**

**In 2 Chronicles 34 verse 2 we read, “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left”. What made this young boy like this? 2 Chronicles 34 verse 1 tells us that “Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign”. Hardly an age when he could actually rule the kingdom without guidance, so who helped develop this young boy in his early years? In 2 Kings 22 verse 1 his mother is mentioned. Her name was Jedidah, which means “Beloved of Yah” and we all know the strong influence mothers have on their children when they are young. They can set the course for life and Jedidah did that.**

**Careful examination of the record reveals that besides his mother, there were Shaphan the scribe; Hilkiyah the High Priest and other faithful people, and we can't imagine that he wouldn't have been friends with Jeremiah who commenced prophesying in the thirteenth year of his reign.**

**The people who are our friends have an enormous influence on our attitude for good or bad. Josiah chose to do what was “right in the sight of Yahweh”.**

**In 2 Chronicles 34 verse 3 we read that “in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young” – he was in fact 16 years old – and age when most teens tend to flex their muscles and strive for independence, but look at what he was doing. Let's read 2 Chronicles 34 verse 3, “He began to seek after the God of David his father”. He had decided his course in life. The instruction by the faithful people around him had developed in Josiah a relationship with his God and a strong conscience and he began to see things around him from God's point of view and he didn't like what he saw. Jeremiah 7 verses 3-10, “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly**

**execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations”.**

**Then, in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of his reign when he was just 20 he had enough knowledge about the correct worship of Yahweh that he organized a purge of idolatry. Josiah was actually fulfilling a prophecy given 340 years earlier in 1 Kings 13 verse 2. It says, “And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men’s bones shall be burnt upon thee”.**

**So now let’s turn back to 2 Chronicles 34 verse 3-7, “And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem”.**

**He could have said “Well that’s the way it is – after all we are at the end of an age”, but no he didn’t give up.**

**Verse 3 tells us that he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and the groves and the carved images and the molten images. These things were in God’s ecclesia. How could this have happened? Just remember all Manasseh’s and Amon’s hard work at corrupting the ecclesia and you have your answer. Josiah was really fired up and began his reformation. Why do I say his reformation? Well look at verse 4, “he cut down, he brake”. Verse 5, “he burnt”. His aim was to get rid of idolatry in Israel. Notice verse 7, “And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel,**

he returned to Jerusalem". Did you notice ALL the land of Israel. It was a widespread purge.

In verse 8 we see that in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his reign at the age of 26 he sends Shaphan and others to repair the house of Yahweh his God. Notice HIS God.

He knew that if the idolatry was taken away there was a need to fill that gap – and he wanted the people to worship their God Yahweh. No more of this “feel good” religion but back to the old ways.

So, the work began. Well, we all know that work means materials and purchase of materials means money. So, where did the money come from for the work? Money had been collected by the Levites, verse 9, “they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites that kept the doors had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin”. So, they effectively had a building/maintenance fund.

Once you have money you then need tradesmen. Let’s read verse 10, “And they put it in the hand of the workmen that had the oversight of the house of the LORD, and they gave it to the workmen that wrought in the house of the LORD, to repair and amend the house”.

It is interesting to note in 2 Kings 22 verse 7 that despite the decline in the nation there was still honesty and integrity in these men. They were not putting their hand into the collection money to feather their own nest – they could be trusted.

2 Kings 22 verse 7, “Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully”.

So, the work proceeded. Can you imagine the surprise of Hilkiah when he found a book. Not just any book but a book of the Law, but it was not just any book of the Law, but one written by Moses himself. He was excited and went to tell Shaphan the scribe. 2 Chronicles 34 verse 15, “And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan”.

Shaphan carried it back to the palace and reported to the king. 2 Chronicles 34 verses 16-18, “And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do it. And they have gathered together that money that was found in the house of

**the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen. Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king”.**

**No wonder the nation was in such a mess. Deuteronomy 17 verses 18-20, “And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel”; tells us that one of the duties of the king was to write out a copy of the law. How could they have done this when it was lost?**

**So, Shaphan read it to the king – actually look at the margin – the Hebrew idea is “in it”. This is supported by other translations. 2 Kings 22 verse 18 gives us an idea as to what part he read.**

**Whatever part he read – look at the reactions in 2 Chronicles 34 verse 19, “And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes”.**

**You’d feel like saying – “Well that’s it, I’m wasting my time. We are doomed!” But he didn’t. By the way, he obviously didn’t believe the current views that “Well God loves you, no matter what” – he was fearful for the nation and sent a delegation to Huldah.**

**This is what she said in 2 Kings 22 verses 15-19, “And she said unto the, Thus saith the LORD God Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hand; there my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy**



clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD". And so that Josiah would be spared from seeing this happen to the nation, God would be merciful to him and kill him. Read verse 20, "Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place".

So, did Josiah fall in a heap and get depressed? No, he doubled his efforts in reforming the nation so that he could save peoples' lives. Why else would he do it – he had been assured of his future, the nation stood condemned, so he tried to change it or at least some of it. 2 Chronicles 34 verses 31-32, "And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers".

In the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his reign he organized a Passover, of which it is said in 2 Chronicles 35 verse 18, "And there was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem".

To an observer, Josiah's reformation looked like a great success but the people really didn't have much of an option when commanded by the king. Look what Jeremiah 3 verse 10 says of the people, "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but (Margin) in falsehood, saith the LORD". It all looked so good but one thing we know about people is that you can't make them do anything – true response comes from the heart, and at this stage we can't see peoples' hearts. 2 Chronicles 34 verse 31 states the covenant was with all "HIS heart and with all HIS soul and he caused all present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it". It was Josiah's covenant, but unfortunately there weren't many with the same enthusiasm as Josiah.

So, what could Yahweh do? Let's read 2 Kings 23 verse 26, "Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And Yahweh said I will remove Judah also out of my sight".

**Josiah never gave up. He spent his last thirteen years concentrating on the temple and its services. So, the time came for the fulfillment of the prophecy that Josiah would be gathered to his grave in peace and the scene was set. Necho king of Egypt was on his way to help the Assyrian king. Although Necho warned Josiah not to meddle, Josiah's dislike of Assyria caused him to intervene and consequently he was killed. 2 Chronicles 35 verses 23-24, "And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchers of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah".**

**What a sad day for Judah. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. They acknowledged him as an inspiring leader. Well, did he come from a good Christadelphian family? No, in fact you could have said, "Don't have anything to do with him; you know what his father was like".**

**But, what did God think of him, after all that is what really counts. Let's read 2 Kings 23 verse 25, "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him".**

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#### **EXHORTATIONAL TALK: NEVER GIVE UP! BE LIKE JOSEPH**

**How many people today blame their past when they fail in life, sin or have something go wrong. They waste so much energy on the "if only" that they become almost paralyzed and just can't move on. Paul tells us in Philippians 3 verse 13: "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things that are before".**

**Here is the image of someone reaching out and despite problems in the way, continuing on. He doesn't look behind and dwell on the past on what might have been – if he did that he wouldn't see what was in front of him.**

**So too, we can't change the past – thinking on it can't change it – we need to deal with it. Store it in the memory section of our brain and move on.**

**Tonight I want you to have a look with me at an amazing example of someone who did not let the past influence his future, but despite enormous set-backs always reached forward and therefore made the most of the present.**

**Let's have a look at Genesis 37 verse 3-4: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him".**

**Put yourself in his place. Can you imagine all the hurtful taunting comments they would have made. For some people that would be all they would need to give up and have a reason for failure forever after.**

**What made the difference? His father's love and his love of God. His father loved him because in him he could see godly characteristics. His brothers hated him so much that in verse 20 they suggested killing him – "their own brother"!**

**Reuben saved him from this but couldn't save him from the horror of them ripping off his coat and throwing him into a pit.**

**They then sat down to eat bread ignoring his cries. We have all read this many times but have you thought how Joseph would have felt? Have a look at Genesis 42 verse 21: "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us".**

**The NIV has "we saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen." Already distressed and fearful they sold him to the Ishmaelites who took him into Egypt. Now he would have been really traumatized – away from his home, his father and his familiar environment and he was only 17.**

**By now a good percentage of people would be saying "well if that's the God we worship, it's not for me – look at what he has allowed in my life so far. There's been so much misery."**

**But it's not over yet for Joseph because next he was bartered for at the slave market like a piece of merchandise. Genesis 39 verse 1: "and Potiphar an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him".**

**By now it would be presumed that many hours of psychiatric counseling would be needed to clear all the bad experiences.**

**Look at verse 2: "And Yahweh was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man, and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian".**

**Verse 3 and verse 5 repeats this “and Joseph found grace in his sight and he served him and he made him overseer over his house”.**

**Now that is not the description of a person wallowing in self-pity. Not the “woe is me” attitude. Not the “giving up” attitude. Not the “it’s not fair” attitude.**

**This is a positive, diligent person who picks himself up, sees opportunities and moves forward. And guess what? It’s no surprise that God blesses the effort.**

**So, by now life took on a more pleasant phase for Joseph and he was in better circumstances and well-liked. So, Potiphar gave him more responsibility. Genesis 39 verse 6: “and he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat”.**

**And then along came another rough patch. Genesis 37 verse 7: “and it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph”. Here was a successful, and as the NIV has it “well built and handsome young man”, and Potiphar’s wife noticed him. It would have been so easy to give in and even be flattered by the attention, but look at Joseph’s answer. Verse 9: “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God”.**

**For years now there had been no one there to encourage him in his spiritual growth. In fact, everything so far that had happened to him could have even blinded him to God’s blessings but he was living in the presence of his God in a godless environment.**

**So shouldn’t things have gone in his favour – that’s what some think happens, but no. Look at verse 20: “and Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison a place where the king’s prisoners were bound and he was there in the prison”.**

**But God is still with him. Look at verse 21: “But Yahweh was with Joseph and shewed him mercy and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison”.**

**And time marched on – daily life in prison. But did Joseph fall in a heap and give up? Even the most positive person could be excused for feeling a bit down by now.**

**Verses 22-23: “And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison, and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand; because Yahweh was with him, and that which he did, Yahweh made it to prosper”.**

**He continued on and gave his best every day. It's just like Philipians 3 verse 13 reaching forward all the time despite obstacles in the way. What an amazing example for all of us. There is not one of us here that can complain about our lot in life.**

**And then a chance comes along with the butler and baker's dreams, as Joseph interprets their dreams and requests in Genesis 40 verse 14: "But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house".**

**But verse 23 says "yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him".**

**Chapter 41 verse 1: "And it came to pass at the end of two full years". Two years more in prison. God was working his purpose out and change was in the wind. The butler remembers when Pharaoh has a dream.**

**Genesis 41 verse 9: "I do remember my faults this day".**

**Genesis 41 verse 14: "Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph and they (margin) made him run out of the dungeon and he shaved himself and changed his raiment and came in unto Pharaoh".**

**Joseph is now 30 years old (Genesis 41 verse 46). He interprets Pharaoh's dream giving God the glory.**

**Notice how often God is mentioned: verse 16, verse 25, verse 28, verse 32. Because of this we find in verses 38-41, "And Pharaoh said unto his servants. Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt".**

**It is now 23 years later. In all that time he suffered more disappointments that most of us will have in a life-time, yet God who sees all things witnessed the steadfastness of Joseph's faith and remembered that it was without the encouragement of father and mother and friends in the truth.**

**From prison to ruler of the land made no difference to Joseph - he didn't become boastful or change his behavior. See verses 48-49.**

**He is working hard and reaching forward and what was his attitude to his past sufferings? He had dealt with it in a positive manner and could reach forth to those things which are before.**

**Genesis 45 verses 4-7: “And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance”.**

**Does this seem to you an angry embittered person or rather someone who pressed forward realizing that God was over-shadowing their lives and humbly submitted to the obstacles along the way.**

**Our life is like jewels, shaped with the hammer and chisel of trials in our life. If a jewel’s hammer isn’t strong enough to chip off our rough edges, God will use a sledge-hammer. If we are really stubborn, he uses a jack-hammer. He will use whatever it takes.**

**Every problem is a character building opportunity.**

**Our circumstances are temporary, but your character will last forever.**

**So, in closing I want to read to you from Psalm 23: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever”.**

**And the thought of the day is from Babe Ruth:**

**It’s hard to beat a person who never gives up!**

**What are we going to do?**