

Deal Pentecostal Church Sermon Outlines 2012

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January: The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him. ^{Nah 1:7}

Sunday 1st January 2012 Psalm 34:1-11

Faith Tablets!

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.

Proverbs 17:22

Our Monthly Memory Verses last year were focused on prayer to assist us in praying properly. As we learn and memorise God's will for ourselves and each other, we can pray boldly and confidently: *So let us boldly approach the throne of grace. Then we will receive mercy. We will find grace to help us when we need it.* ^{Heb.4:16(NIRV)} *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.* ^{1Jn.5:14-15}

This year, our Monthly Memory Verses will help us trust God through every situation because we know what God is like, what He wants, what He thinks, what He says and what He does. January's verse is: **The LORD is good, a Refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him.** ^{Nahum 1:7} Whilst just reciting the verse will not automatically produce faith or even change our situation, when we understand the simple yet profound truths in that statement, we will believe God, that is, trust, accept and are confident in Him. *“Affirmations are not a technique to get what you want in life but rather a means of building the truths of God's Word into the life of and consequences of a Believer in dependence on the Holy Spirit”* ^{E.W. Kenyon}

Medicines can make us comfortable and relieve the symptoms illness until our body can recover but God's Word really does work in the lives of Believers: *the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.* ^{1Thes.2:13} We must take every opportunity to make our spirit dominate our soul and life: *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.* ^{Ps.42:5}

We can do this by pondering on God's Word and believing what God has said; by praising Him (honouring Him and respecting what he has said) and by not disagreeing with God: *Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker.* ^{Isaiah 45:9}

It is a great comfort to know that God doesn't have to come from heaven to help us. No! When God hears us and helps us, He is already with us and so we can be sure that help is always available: *Don't you realize that Christ Jesus is in you?* ^{2Cor.13:5} *My dear children, you belong to God and have defeated them; because God's Spirit, who is in you, is greater than the devil, who is in the world.* ^{1Jn.4:4 (NCV)}

Let's make it our goal to live a peaceful and contented life throughout this year: *I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before Him.* ^{Ecc.8:12} *But godliness with contentment is great gain.* ^{1Tim.6:6} The NIRV puts it this way: *You gain a lot when you live a godly life. But you must be happy with what you have.*

We can do this because we know that God is good: *You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees (teach me your principles; train me in your goodness; give me knowledge of your rules).* ^{Ps.119:68}

Some of the other verses we will learn this year are: *My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.* ^{Ps.119:50} *Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens. Our God is a God who saves;* ^{Ps.68:19-20} *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* ^{Col.3:17}

So this year let us aspire to maturity by determining to make the right choices in every situation *[our] responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.* ^{Eph.4:13 (NLT)} *Solid food is for those who are mature, who have trained themselves to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right.* ^{Heb.5:14 (NLT)}

***Lord Jesus, Rise up within me and cause me to triumph
and walk in victory every moment of today!***

Wishing you a Blessed New Year as we put God's Word into practice ^{Matt.7:24}

Sunday 8th January 2012 Psalm 34:11f

It is more blessed to give than to receive ^{Acts 20:35}

To be **blessed** is to be **happy** (as some Bible versions translate the Beatitudes): *Happy are the poor in spirit: for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Happy are...* ^{Matt.5:3f} True happiness does not come from external stimuli but from within – it is the “feel-good” factor of being content and of helping others. There is a blessing in receiving (especially when you have a need) but there is an even greater blessing in giving. However you cannot give if no one is willing to receive. It is sometimes hard to accept gifts from others, especially gifts of help and encouragement, for we all aspire to be self-sufficient. True fellowship is sharing (a partnership) in giving and receiving: *[the Church at Philippi] entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving.* ^{Phil.4:15(ESV)}

Gift of Dowry

A dowry is a wedding gift: *Abraham said to the man in charge of his household... “I want you to ...get a wife for my son Isaac.” ...Then he brought out silver and gold jewellery and lovely clothing for Rebekah.* ^{Gen.24:1-53} We are the Bride of Christ: *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.* ^{Rev.21:2}

Gold and Silver stand for the building material of our lives: **WISDOM** (applied knowledge): *Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.* ^{Prov.3:13-15}

We should be careful how we build our lives because we will be tested: *But each one should build carefully. No one can lay any other foundation than the one that has already been laid. That foundation is Jesus Christ. A person may build on it using gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay or straw. But each person's work will be shown for what it is. On judgment day it will be brought to light. It will be put through fire. The fire will test how good everyone's work is. If the building doesn't burn up, God will give the builder a reward for his work. If the building burns up, the builder will lose everything. The builder will be saved, but only like one escaping through the flames. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple? God's Spirit lives in you.* ^{1Cor.3:10-16)(NIV)}

We should bless others with God's Wisdom by living a wise life

Gift of Dedication

When David brought the Ark to Jerusalem there was great rejoicing because it represented God being with His people. David then gave presents of food: *David and all his men ...brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent... he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women.* ^{2Sam.6:1-19} **God's Word is our spiritual food:** *Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.* ^{Matt.4:4}

We should bless others with God's Word by living a Jesus honouring life

Gift of Deliverance

Haman was intending to annihilate the Jewish race but God gave them deliverance: *Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, to celebrate annually ...the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies ...when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.* ^{Est.9:18-23}

We have been delivered from spiritual death and sin: *God has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* ^{2Tim.1:9-10}

We should bless others with God's Hope by living a happy life

For I know what I have planned for you,' says the LORD. 'I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope. When you call out to me and come to me in prayer, I will hear your prayers. When you seek me in prayer and worship, you will find me available to you. If you seek me with all your heart and soul, I will make myself available to you,' says the LORD. ^{Jer.29:11-14 (NET)} *Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Those blessings come from the heavenly world. They belong to us because we belong to Christ.... We have been set free because of what Christ has done. Through his blood our sins have been forgiven. We have been set free because God's grace is so rich. He poured his grace on us by giving us great wisdom and understanding.* ^{Eph.1:3-8 (NIV)}

Sunday 15th January 2012 Psalm 36

"Jesus unites, doctrine divides!"

This sounds very spiritual and helpful but is actually the opposite of the truth! For 2000 years Jesus has been dividing people. Jesus said: *Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.* ^{Matt.10:34} When Jesus ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit, He split the earth in two, dividing it between the Believer and unbeliever; between condemned and justified. *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south... On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east... and half of it west... in summer and in winter.* ^{Zech.14:4} *This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives* ^{Acts 1:11-12} *Jesus said "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within*

them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. ^{Jn.7:38-39}

But clear, sound understanding of what the Bible really teaches has united people of all backgrounds and abilities. All Believers should be good **exegetes** (that is, be able to interpret the Bible accurately). The problem we face is: how do we do it? There is **positive exegesis** (what the Scriptures are saying) and **negative exegesis** (what the Scriptures are not saying). When interpreting a text we need to determine what the text doesn't say and explore the possibilities of what it could be saying. We should then be able to reject bad doctrines (those doctrines that cannot be supported from the Scriptures or can even be disproved from Scripture). We should also be able to make a reasonable case for our doctrinal position and understand the different positions of others.

Sound doctrine also stops Christianity from being a hard, difficult and divisive. *Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.* ^{2Tim.2:14-15}

We should keep our doctrine based on Scripture and not involve ourselves in *myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith.* ^{1Tim.1:4} *Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.* ^{2Tim.2:23}

The purpose of the Scriptures is to point us to God as revealed in Jesus - they reveal and explain Jesus: *the Scriptures you study give witness about me.* ^{Jn.5:39} Everything God wants us to know about Himself, about ourselves, about life, about death, in fact about any spiritual matter, has already been recorded in the Scriptures for us to read **BUT** the benefits are only available to us through Jesus Christ. If we only see the Bible as an information book or even a spiritual manual we will miss the point of it. The Bible paints pictures of Jesus through real life experiences and it is up to us to apply them to our own situations (either positively or negatively). We see it with Adam who made the wrong choice (disobeyed) contrasted with the Last Adam who made the right choice (obeyed): *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive... The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.* ^{1Cor.15:22-44} We see it in Noah: *in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. **It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*** ^{1Pet.3:20-22}

These symbolisms or pictures of Jesus carry on right through the O.T. (*the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ* ^{Gal.3:24}) The N.T. is much clearer. In the Gospels, Jesus own life illustrates God's revelation of Himself. *No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.* ^{Jn.6:46} *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.* ^{Jn.14:9} *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. He has shown us what God is like.* ^{Jn.1:17-18} The rest of the N.T. explains how to live a life that honours Jesus: *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.* ^{1Cor.11:1} *You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of crooked and perverse people. Let your lives shine brightly before them.* ^{Phil.2:15} ^(NLT) *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* ^{Jn.8:12} *"You are the light of the world. A*

town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.^{Matt.5:14-16}

Let us believe what God has revealed about Himself and then live like it

Sunday 22nd January 2012 Psalm 37 John 8:1-32

Are you an Eisegete?

Jesus said that that people would never walk in darkness if they followed Him.^{Jn.8:12} He is right about everything and especially this statement but *the Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."* Jesus answered, *"Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going... In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."*^{Jn.8:13}

If we agree with God, we will always be right! But this is where the problem has been! We want God to agree with us, instead of us agreeing with God. How we interpret the Bible is important and that's where exegesis comes in. Last week we discussed the importance of being a good **Exegete** – someone who is able to know the intended meaning of a Biblical text. An **Eisegete** is someone who puts meaning into the text of Scripture that may not be the intended meaning and that is the basis of Christian superstition, false doctrine and division in the Church.

Understanding the Bible involves work. *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*^{2Tim.2:15} This is not strenuous, tiring work (*a fool's work wearies him*^{Ecc.10:15}) but nevertheless there is an effort involved in reading and studying the Bible and we need the Holy Spirit to help us. *No prophecy in Scripture ever came from a prophet's own understanding. It never came simply because a prophet wanted it to. Instead, the Holy Spirit guided the prophets as they spoke.*^{2Pet.1:20-21 (NIRV)} God has also given us people who can help us: *[They] instructed the people who were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage.*^{Neh.8:7-8 (NLT)}

Paul encouraged Timothy to be a good exegete and warned him of others who were eisegetes: *Preach the word. Be ready to serve God in good times and bad. Correct people's mistakes. Warn them. Cheer them up with words of hope. Be very patient as you do these things. Teach them carefully. The time will come when people won't put up with true teaching. Instead, they will try to satisfy their own longings. They will gather a large number of teachers around them. The teachers will say what the people want to hear. The people will turn their ears away from the truth. They will turn to stories that aren't completely true.*^{2Tim.2:2-4 (NIRV)}

Scripture is the best commentary on Scripture and we need to compare Scripture with Scripture **BUT** we must understand that the Bible has Old and New Testaments (Covenants) and that Jesus has divided the world between those with eternal life and those without (Believers and Unbelievers).

John wrote that there are 3 witnesses to the fact God that has given us eternal life in Jesus: **Water, Blood and Spirit.** *Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.*

We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ^{1Jn.5:5-12}

The **Water** represents Jesus birth – He came from heaven as a human to be Christ our Saviour. *No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.* ^{Jn.3:13} *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.* ^{Jn.6:38}

The **Blood** represents Jesus death – He died vicariously (as our Substitute, in our place). *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.* ^{Is.53:5}

The **Spirit** affirms Jesus. *But I will send you the Counsellor—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will tell you all about me.* ^{Jn.15:26}

We now have this truth in our head and our heart: *All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true.* ^{1Jn.5:10 (NLT)}

but we must trust God not our conscience: *My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.* ^{1Cor.4:4}

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ^{Jn.8:31}

Stop doubting and believe! ^{Jn.20:27}

Sunday 29th January 2012 Psalm 37:23-40 John 8:31-40

Family Traits

Who is your father?

Some animals have recorded pedigree stretching back hundreds of years. Family traits and characteristics such as colour, size and shape can be traced back many generations which is especially helpful when breeding animals to a type. All modern Thoroughbred horses can trace their pedigrees to three stallions originally imported into England in the 17th and 18th centuries: the Byerley Turk (1680s), the Darley Arabian (1704), and the Godolphin Arabian (1729).

[Byerley Turk was captured from the Turks by Captain Robert Byerley at the Battle of Buda (1686) – a war in Hungary by the Holy League (consisting of Holy Roman Empire, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Venetian Republic and the Tsardom of Russia) against the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire, as part of the follow-up campaign in Hungary after the Battle of Vienna. The Holy League took Buda (Budapest) after a long siege]

Although our physical traits are hereditary, our emotional traits are imprinted before birth or imparted soon afterwards and can be changed – **we need not be imprisoned by our emotions and personality!** There is something more powerful than our circumstances and our soul. We can know freedom from our past and our personality problems. Even Esau, who sold his inheritance for a bowl of broth, was blessed with the option of shaking off his past: *It was by faith that Isaac blessed his two sons, Jacob and Esau. He had confidence in what God was going to do in the future.* ^{Heb.11:20 (NIV)} *You will live by the sword. And you will serve your brother. But you will grow restless. Then you will throw off the heavy load he put on your shoulders.* ^{Gen.27:40 (NIV)}

Like David, we must learn to make our God nature (spirit) dominate our natural nature (soul) *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?* ^{Ps.42:5} So how do we do it? David gives us the answer in the next line: *Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.* ^{Ps.42:5}

God's Spirit with our spirit can always overcome our soul: *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.* ^{1Jn.4:4} and **God's Word in us (faith) can always overcome the world:** *for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.* ^{1Jn.5:4-5}

However it is important that we learn from others – that we use good faithful Believers as role models and let them become our “fathers” by imparting godly values and goals to us. We want people who will help us not hinder us, who will stick with us not run away when hardship comes. *A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.* ^{Jn.10:12-13(NLT)}

There are plenty of people who want to be mere guardians but true “fathers” are rare: *I am not writing these things to shame you, but to warn you as my beloved children. For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. So I urge you to imitate me. That's why I have sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. He will remind you of how I follow Christ Jesus, just as I teach in all the churches wherever I go.* ^{1Cor.4:14-17}

People can appear “spiritual” and may even have some gifting but if they don't develop their character they won't stay the pace or finish the race! Although a *gift opens the way and ushers the giver into the presence of the great,* ^{Prov.18:16} it is our character (diligence) that will sustain us: *diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labour.* ^{Prov.12:24}

When King Saul began to prophesy, he looked every part a prophet but one wise man asked who his father was: *When all those who had formerly known Saul saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, “What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?” A man who lived there answered, “And who is their father?”* ^{1Sam.10:12} Unlike his successor David, King Saul was not diligent and did not make his spirit overcome his natural emotions (his soul). David's lament at Saul's death was that *the shield of Saul will no longer be anointed with oil.* ^{2Sam.1:21 (NLT)} i.e. Saul's faith (shield) had no anointing (of the Holy Spirit).

Although we may not have so called “spiritual giants” (whoever they may be) to be our “father” to help us, we do have the same Father as Jesus that we can call on: *This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven.* ^{Matt.6:9} *So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father.* ^{Heb.2:11(NLT)} *Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’* ^{Jn.20:17}

What spiritual family traits can others see in you? What likeness to our “Elder Brother” Jesus do you have? Do you speak like Him or behave so much like Him that people mistake you for Jesus? If not, try imitating Him.

You should think in the same way Christ Jesus does. ^{Phil.2:5 (NIV)} *And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.* ^{1Cor.11:1} *God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence*

to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. ^{Heb.6:10-12}

February: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. ^{Romans15:13}

Sunday 5th February 2010 Psalm 39

The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him. ^{Nah 1:7}

We are living in a Postmodern Society which basically means that our Society has no definite terms, no boundaries and no absolute truths! This view is promoted through our education, media and entertainment. No one has the authority to define truth or impose upon others their ideas of moral right and wrong. This is not new: *History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. Sometimes people say, "Here is something new!" But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new. We don't remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.* ^{Ecd.1:9-11 (NLT)}

So when we state that Jesus is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through [Him]*^{n.14:6} we face the same reaction that Jesus did: *You are trying to kill me because I told you the truth... I am telling you the truth... But you don't listen because you don't belong to God.*^{Jn.8:40-47 (NLT)}

But we can and do state with confidence: *I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*^{2Tim.1:12} Although this assurance makes us different from the society we live in, actually people are crying out for hope and a sense of security that the world cannot provide. We need to assert clearly and joyfully our faith in God through Jesus Christ: *We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*^{Heb.6:19}

The LORD is good

We must be clear about God's nature: He is good and there is no bad or evil in Him: *God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone,*^{Jas.1:13} David encouraged the people to sing: *Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.*^{1Chron.16:34} and prayed to God: *You are good, and what you do is good; Teach me your orders.*^{Ps.119:68 (NLT)} So we can always trust God to turn our situation around for our good and His glory: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*^{Rom.8:28}

One of the Hebrew words for Praise is *Yadah* from where we get Judah and it literally means to throw out your hand: *You are my God, and I will praise (Yadah) you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks (Yadah) to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.*^{Ps.118:28-29}

In praise we lift our hands to God, reaching out and asserting that He is good; we never lift our hands to God in anger or resentment, shaking our fist at Him: *For they shake their fists at God, defying the Almighty.*^{Job.15:25}

A refuge in times of trouble

God is a refuge or stronghold. This word is translated twice as **helmet**: *Ephraim is my helmet; (the defence of my head.*^{ASV})^{Ps.60:7} In our spiritual armour we have *the helmet of salvation*^{Eph.6:17} to protect us. God can and does intervene to protect us but He also expects us to wear our **helmet** (our defence of our minds). We must know that we are saved and to think that way too! We are saved **from** sin (i.e. from sin's control, influence and consequences) but we are also saved **for** God (i.e. we now belong to Him). We need to renew our mind-set, our outlook, our world-view, because we now belong to God: *Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.*^{Jn.8:47} An **Expatriate** is someone who lives in a different country from where they are a citizen. They live with home values and customs in a foreign land and so never really integrate. If a Christian tries to live as an **Expat** from the world (i.e. keep their pre-Christian values and customs) they will always have unnecessary difficulties. We must live as citizens of heaven whilst here on earth – a **heavenly Expat**: *I have told you those things many times before. Now I say it again with tears in my eyes. Many people live like enemies of the cross of Christ. The only thing they have coming to them is death. Their stomach is their god. They brag about what they should be ashamed of. They think only about earthly things. But we are citizens of heaven. And we can hardly wait for a Saviour from there. He is the Lord Jesus Christ.*^{Phil.3:18-20 (NIV)}

He cares for those who trust in Him

God's care is based on His knowledge of us. Other translations put it this way: *God knows (is close to and protects) those who seek refuge in him.* Another version states: *He recognizes and welcomes anyone looking for help.* Yes God knows all about us: *O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD.*^{Ps.139:1-4(NLT)}

Like Moses, we can state that *the person who rests in the shadow of the Most High God will be kept safe by the Mighty One.*^{Ps.91:1(NIV)}

Don't be intimidated by Postmodern Society

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.^{Phil.1:4-6}

Sunday 12th February 2012 Ps.40 Jn.9

How good is your eyesight?

The eyesight of many people deteriorate as they get older and they need to wear glasses or have surgery, with some even losing their sight altogether. Solomon encourages us to remember our Creator before this happens: *Remember the One who created you. Remember him while you are still young. Think about him before ...the sunlight become[s] dark... [before] those who look through the windows... [can't] see very well.*^{Ecd.12:1-5 NIV}

Blindness makes people rely, at least to some extent, on others. There are great helps available such as guide dogs, braille, audio-books etc. but blindness is described as a disability. However some exceptional people are able to rise far above their disabilities. Fanny Crosby (1820 – 1915) was one of these and she knew all the presidents during her lifetime except George Washington, with many becoming good friends of hers. But Fanny never mastered Braille, blaming her calloused guitar fingers and if she wanted to

know what a book said, people would read to her, and the contents were stamped on her memory! She was a preacher, teacher and lecturer as well as a hymn writer, harpist and organist. She was called the “*Mother of modern congregational singing in America*” and wrote more than 8000 hymns, many of which are sung today, as well as over 1000 secular poems. The death of her young daughter inspired the hymn “Safe in the Arms of Jesus”. As a child Fanny wrote this verse: *O what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see, I am resolved that in this world, Contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy, That other people don't. To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot and I won't!*

When Jesus and His disciples encountered a blind man they asked Him why he was blind - who's fault was it? Many translations imply that God made the man blind so Jesus could heal him: *This happened so that God's work could be shown in his life.* ^{Jn.9:3} Does God cause misfortune so He can step in and rectify it, for His glory? The New Testament has no such teaching. What Jesus actually said was “**Never mind who or what is to blame; let the works of God be manifested**” then He healed the man.

This historical event has practical and spiritual applications for us.

We believe in a Full or “Foursquare” Gospel, proclaiming **Jesus as Saviour, Baptiser, Healer and King**. Jehovah Rapha (*for I am the LORD, who heals you* ^{Ex.15:26}) is revealed as the Word that God sent to heal the people. ^{Ps.107:20} *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.* ^{Acts 10:38} Jesus sent His followers out to do the same: *Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.* ^{Lk.9:1-2} *And these signs will accompany those who believe: ...they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.* ^{Mk.16:17-18} We must obey Jesus. “Let the works of God be manifest!” It is a command.

But this story also has a spiritual application: Jesus said, “I have come into this world to judge it. I have come so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this. They asked, “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But since you claim you can see, you remain guilty.” ^{Jn.9:39-41}

Spiritual blindness is more than a disability – it is death. If we can't see Jesus as the Son of God we will never live: *I told you that you would die in your sins. Do you believe that I am the one I claim to be? If you don't, you will certainly die in your sins.* ^{Jn.8:24}

Although unbeliever's minds are blinded (veiled) to the Gospel, spiritual sight comes when we turn to Jesus: *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* ^{2Cor.4:3-4} *But their minds were made stubborn (hardened or dull). To this very day, the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. The veil has not been removed. Only faith in Christ can take it away. To this very day, when the Law of Moses is read, a veil covers the minds of those who hear it.* **But when anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.** ^{2Cor.3:14-16} Revelation (literally *un-veiling*) comes through reflecting (meditating) on what God has said and remembering Jesus: *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel* ^{2Tim.2:7-8}

Spiritual sight enables us to see as God sees: that sin is bad and separates us from God; that only Jesus is our Saviour; that salvation is the result of sins forgiven: *that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* ^{Lk.24:27(NKJV)} **Remission means forgiven, sent away, removed, freedom,**

released. *He has sent me to proclaim freedom (remission) for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release (remission) the oppressed*^{Jk.4:18} When our blindness goes we can see Jesus as Peter and Thomas did: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*^{Matt.16:16} *‘My Lord and my God!’*^{Jn.20:28}

We don't have to physically see Jesus – we can see Him by faith: *Then Jesus told [Thomas], ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me but still have believed.’*^{Jn.20:29}

Can you see clearly or do you have blurred vision?

Sunday 19th February Psalm 23 John 10

Jesus the Good Shepherd

In spite of the evolutionary theories, man did not evolve from hunter to herdsman. There is no mention of hunters until Noah's great grandson, Nimrod.^(Gen.10:8-9) Adam was an arable farmer^(Gen.2:15) as was his eldest son (Cain).^(Gen.4:2) Adam's 2nd son (Abel) was a shepherd^(Gen.4:2) as were Israel's Patriarchs and so it was natural for God to use Shepherding as a picture of His care for us. The proper pastoral care for animals has many parallels with care for people. A good shepherd can anticipate problems and so avoid most emergencies: *Know the state of your flocks, and put your heart into caring for your herds.*^{Pron.27:23(NLT)} King David's training to be king was as a shepherd: *He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them.*^{Ps.78:70-2}

Psalm 23, which has brought hope and comfort to millions of people over thousands of years, was written by David as he reflected on his time as a shepherd.

The LORD is my shepherd. He gives me everything I need.^(NIrV) Jesus revealed Himself as the Good Shepherd^{Jn.10:11} who truly cares for us: *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.*^{Jn.3:16} Jesus is no thief^{Jn.10:1} stranger^{Jn.10:5} or hireling^{Jn.10:12} but Someone who leads us into spiritual blessings which overflow from us to others.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. Sheep lie down and “chew the cud” which basically means they regurgitate their food and eat it again! God has given us clear instructions on how to succeed: *Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*^{Josh.1:8} We must study the Scriptures, talk about them, think about them and apply them! As we talk and share what we believe about God we understand more about our inheritance in Christ: *I pray that you will be active in sharing what you believe. Then you will completely understand every good thing we have in Christ.*^{Phile.1:6 (NIrV)} Another translation puts it this way: *And I keep praying that this faith we hold in common keeps showing up in the good things we do, and that people recognize Christ in all of it.*

He leads me beside quiet waters (or *waters of rest*). God gives us rest when we trust Him. Trust is not difficult – it is a matter of agreeing with God! i.e. we don't quarrel or argue with Him! *How terrible it will be for anyone who argues with his Maker!*^{Is.45:9(NIrV)} *Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?*^{Amos 3:3} Trust gives us joy, peace and hope: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*^{Rom.15:13}

He refreshes my soul. How tired are you? Take note of Solomon's advice: *A fool's work wears him,*^{Ecc.10:15} (The Bible defines a fool as someone who ignores God^{Ps.14:1;53:1;Lk.12:20})

He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake. God's ways are right ways and the Holy Spirit is our Guide. But our life should never be "meandering" like a river going around every obstacle – we have been redeemed to live of overcoming and victory *The blood of Christ set you free from an empty way of life.*^{1Pet.1:18} *I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*^{Phil.4:12-13}

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Fear is debilitating and deadly but actually it is only the anticipation of something that has not yet happened! Because God is with us we should not be afraid. *So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid".*^{Heb.13:6}

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. What comforts you? *Rod* is also translated *sceptre*^{Gen.49:10} (*authority or the right to rule*) and represents the Holy Spirit in us. *Staff* is a walking-stick-cum-shepherd's crook and represents the Scriptures – a real support and help: *Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.*^{Ps.119:165}

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. God does not take us out of trouble but provides for us wherever we are. *The LORD had given [David] peace and rest from all of his enemies who were around him.*^{2Sam.7:1}

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. God's anointing is on the Head (Jesus) but this always causes us to flow-over! *For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water will flow out from within.* (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him.)^{Jn.7:38-39(NLT)}

Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. The word *follow* is usually applied to the *pursuit by enemies* but here it is God's goodness and love that chases us! God's blessings come with such vigour and drive that they will always catch up with us!

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. When you speak of your home, what do you mean? Are you a heavenly Expat? Or do you still think of this earthly life as your main focus. *Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honour and power. Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth.*^{Col.3:1-2}

How well do you know the Good Shepherd?

I know my sheep and my sheep know me^{Jn.10:14}

Sunday 26th February Ps.42

(Guest Speaker: Sasha Rodionov Latvia. His sermon is available on cd or from our website under: Who We Are/Diary)

William Wilberforce (1759 – 1833) felt he lived in times when civil society had deteriorated so greatly that people no longer knew how to be nice to others. One of the first initiatives he undertook was the establishment of the **Society For The Reformation of Manners**. We are living in similar times and should remember Paul's exhortation to *do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*^{Gal.6:10} Christians are God's representatives on earth: *We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you.*^{2Cor.5:20} We should have a reputation for being good-mannered and honourable to everyone not and just our friends: *Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.*

Matt.5:47(TM) When you knock on a door, be courteous in your greeting. *Matt.10:12(TM)* If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal?

Ethics is behaviour based on a set of beliefs. So for us Believers, our behaviour is influenced and indeed controlled by our faith – about what we believe about God. There are not 2 sets of standards, 1 for the pastor and another for congregation for we are all equal under the headship of Jesus and ministers in the New Covenant: *He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.* *2Cor.3:6* You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. *1Pet.2:5* So the qualifications for Ministers (Elders and Deacons) in 1Tim.5 and Titus2 are actually God's standards for all of us. God will call us all to account but the more public our ministry the more we are expected to live up to the highest standards: *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.* *Jas.3:1* But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. *1Cor.9:27(ESV)*

Here are some helpful guidelines: Drive courteously; Acknowledge people with a greeting (and smile!); Saying “please” and “thank you”; Wait patiently to be served; Serve others with courtesy; Increase your value as an employee to your employer by working diligently and going the “extra mile”; Don't give non-Christians lesser service than you would give anyone else; When you make a commitment - honour it! (if you promise to return a phone call in “10 minutes” then do it!).

There is a way back! If we do make mistakes or even wilfully do wrong, there is a way back to God. The Gospel is about forgiveness of sins and restoration: *Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations* *Lk.24:46-47(ASV)* Remission means dismissal, release, sent away; and the Christian message is that God has separated our sins from us (like a surgeon amputating a limb!). Our sins are no longer attached to us and we are free – free from our sins and also free from the guilt and spiritual consequences of our sins. Isaac Watts in his hymn *Jesus shall reign wherever the sun* writes:

Blessings abound where'er He reigns; the prisoner leaps to lose his chains;

The weary find eternal rest, and all the sons of want are blessed.

Where He displays His healing power, death and the curse are known no more:

In Him the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost.

Even Esau who treated his family heritage with contempt was able find a way back: *Isaac answered Esau, “I have made Jacob lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants... So what can I possibly do for you, my son?” Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud. His father Isaac answered him, “Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. **But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.*** *Gen.27:37f*

Never think that God isn't interested in you or that you are not quite good enough for Him. If you were “good enough” by yourself you would not need God's grace. *So he gave us new life because of what Christ has done. He gave us life even when we were dead in sin. God's grace has saved you. God raised us up with Christ. He has seated us with him in his heavenly kingdom because we belong to Christ Jesus. He has done it to show the riches of his grace for all time to come. His grace can't be compared with anything else. He has shown it by being kind to us because of what Christ Jesus has done. God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come*

from anything you do. It is God's gift. It is not based on anything you have done. No one can brag about earning it. God made us. He created us to belong to Christ Jesus. Now we can do good things. Long ago God prepared them for us to do. ^{Eph.2:5-10(NIrV)}

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus... Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ^{Phil.3:12-17}

Let's live up to what we have already attained!

March: I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before Him. ^{Ecc.8:12}

Sunday 4th March Ps.82 John 10

Are you living as a mere human or more than a human?

Some people don't defend the cause of the weak and fatherless [or] maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed... they know nothing, they understand nothing and they walk about in darkness. ^{Ps.82:3-5}

Although they are called sons of the Most High [they] will die like mere men ^{Ps.82:6-7} How sad to have the label of “sons of God” but not to live like God’s family because how we live will determine how we will die!

How do you imagine the next 10 years will work out for you? Most of us will lose loved ones and some of us we will face death ourselves. How will we die? – like a mere human or like a “god” – a *son of the Most High*? We are to make sound godly judgments and decisions like God if we are to live like “gods”. The term “god” is translated “judge” in the NLT which is helpful: *God presides in the great assembly; he renders judgment (decisions) among the “gods” (judges* ^{NLT}). ^{Ps.82:1}

Believers are “sons of God” and have the potential to live spiritually healthy lives that are happy and full of hope. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God belongs to blessed people ^(Matt.5:3-10) but in reality some of God's children are still living as slaves: *As long as your own children are young, they are no different from slaves in your house. They are no different, even though they own all of the property... When we were children, we were slaves to the basic things the people of the world believe... Because you are his children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. He is the Holy Spirit... So you aren't slaves any longer. You are God's children. Because you are his children, he gives you what he promised to give his people.* ^{Gal.4:1-7NIrV}

If we are to live like God and make decisions or judgements like Him, what is God really like? God often showed His anger against sin in the OT, but Jesus showed us what God was really like and thus made it possible for us to relate to Him. *Jesus Christ has given us grace and truth. No one has ever seen God. But God, the one and only Son, is at the Father's side. He has shown us what God is like.* ^{Jn.1:14NIrV} *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?* ^{Jn.14:9NLT} God has always been *The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.* ^{Ex 34:6-7} God is described like that 9

times. ^{Ex.34:6; 2Ch.30:9; Ne.9:17; Ps.86:15;103:8;111:4;145:8; Joel2:13; Jonah4:2.} This is also the description of those who fear God: *Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands... Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous.* ^{Ps.112:1-4}

God's gracious and compassionate Character is not sentimental or weak for *The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity. The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.* ^{Ps.9:7-9}

God expects us to behave the same: *How long will you stand up for those who aren't fair to others? How long will you show favour to sinful people? Stand up for those who are weak and for those whose fathers have died. See to it that those who are poor and those who are beaten down are treated fairly. Save the weak and those who are in need. Save them from the power of sinful people.* ^{Ps.82:2-4NIV}

Society no longer stands up for the rights of good people; people today have become intolerant of right, of good, of God's morality. God wants us to return to the simple Gospel of *peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* ^{Rom.5:1}.

We can only do this if we live as *sons of the Most High* and not as *mere men*. Paul criticised people for living as *mere men*. He said: *For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?* ^{1Cor.3:3}

We can be different without being divisive: *I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.* ^{1Cor.11:18-19}

If we do begin to feel despondent or have a defeatist attitude we should praise God (say good and true things about God). We must make our (born-again) spirit dominate our emotions not let our emotions dominate us:

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. ^{Ps.42:5}

By acting righteously we can live as Citizens of God's Kingdom and enjoy the benefits of belonging to God's Family. People today need to experience God in the same way they did through Jesus but their only contact with Him is through us. If we will live like His children we can have the confidence that we will face the end of our life as God's children. This will bring honour to God and hope to the world:

The Spirit of the LORD speaks through me; his words are upon my tongue. The God of Israel spoke. The Rock of Israel said to me: The one who rules righteously, who rules in the fear of God, is like the light of morning at sunrise, like a morning without clouds, like the gleaming of the sun on new grass after rain. ^{2Sam.23:2-4NLT}

Sunday 11th March Ps.43

(Ray Teague preaching. Paul at Prieka Vests Church, Riga, Latvia)

Expect a Miracle every day; expect a Miracle when you pray

If you can expect it; God will make a way

To perform a Miracle for you each day!

I believe in Miracles because I believe in God!

God performs Miracles!

You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. ^{Ps.77:14} Christianity is based on the life and teachings of Jesus as presented in Bible. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, God having become human and the saviour of humanity. ^(Wikipedia)

Christianity is 100% supernatural. Jesus' life is miraculous - His conception, birth, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension; this could not have happened without God's intervention. **The Bible is miraculous** – to have so many people write it over many hundreds of years and yet it all clearly describes Jesus and our

salvation – this could not have happened without God’s intervention. **Our Faith is miraculous** – that we can have peace with God although we are born separated from Him (dead in our sins and His enemies) – this could not have happened without God’s intervention. So miracles are to be expected and it is no surprise that God intervenes in our lives to help us, heal us or encourage us.

To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: May you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.^{Dan.4:4} *The whole assembly became silent as they listened... about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.*^{Acts 15:12} *God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*^{Heb.2:4}

What is a Miracle?

A miracle is when God does something that we cannot do; it is a supernatural intervention pointing to God as its cause. T.L.Osborn states: “**miracles of healing were manifested in the early church and the true church has never changed.**” “**Each Miracle healing becomes undeniable proof that the Gospel is indeed true!**” George Canty wrote to me: *Most people coming for healing and receiving cures simply expect it, get what they came for, and don’t even come again... About 80% of people for whom we pray have no visible sickness and there is nothing dramatic to witness, or even report. Miracles occur, but only the patients know how real they were. In my Kings Cross campaign, a woman with chronic depression was immediately restored, so much so that her husband beat her up believing she was euphoric over meeting another man... The outsider often has more faith than those in the church. There is a remarkable public attitude towards the miraculous.*

Miracles do not mean we are always right.

Miracles follow those who **BELIEVE**^{Mark 16:17} not those who are doctrinally right or those who are “spiritual”. **Doctrine (what we believe about God) should be determined by Scripture, not by experience.**

What should our attitude be towards Miracles?

Miracles were a normal part of Jesus’ ministry & authenticated His ministry; **Miracles** accompanied and authenticated the Apostles’ ministry; **Miracles** do not produce faith; **Miracles** can be counterfeited by satan and deceive people **Miracles** that are “good” or “kind” do not necessarily prove they are from God but the atmosphere in which they happen is a good pointer; **Miracles** are also tools for evangelism - tangible miracles are visible to others and wonderful conversation openers. After all who can keep quiet about a miraculous healing; **Miracles** are a token of God’s love; **Miracles** are a means of blessing in themselves especially healing, protection and provision.

When it comes to healing, the most important thing is that something of God is revealed on this poor earth. Hold fast to this and never let go of it. If you have been healed by a miracle, but still continue to give yourself to earthly things, what has been gained? If you lie mortally ill and the Saviour heals you and you take it for granted, thinking only of your family and your business, what good is it? Look up. Look up. There is your prize. When we experience signs and wonders, something must change in us. Let us go to the Saviour in our need and cry to him: “Lord, help us!” But we must also listen to him. And when we have been helped, then let us do the will of God. Let Jesus wrench us out of our earthly ways so that we may have life in his name. Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (www.plough.com)

BUT the greatest Miracle is New Birth – to be born again from God when we were spiritually dead! *“What I’m about to tell you is true. No one can see God’s kingdom without being born*

again.” “How can I be born when I am old?” Nicodemus asked. “I can't go back inside my mother! I can't be born a second time!” Jesus answered, “What I'm about to tell you is true. No one can enter God's kingdom without being born through water and the Holy Spirit. People give birth to people. But the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised when I say, ‘You must all be born again.’” ^{Jn.3:3-7NIrV}

Jesus shows what God is like: Jesus answered... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. ^{Jn.14:9} Jesus Miracles showed His deity: Believe me when I say I am in the Father. Also believe that the Father is in me. Or at least believe what the miracles show about me. ^{Jn.14:11} Jesus did many other miraculous signs in front of his disciples. They are not written down in this book. But these are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life because you belong to him. ^{Jn.20:30-31}

Remember God's Miracles and talk about them. Ebenezer... Thus far has the Lord helped us. ^{1Sam.7:12}

Use miracles, signs and wonders as conversation openers but worship God not the Miracle: When I heard this, I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Don't do that! I serve God, just as you do. I am God's servant, just like other believers who hold firmly to what Jesus has taught. Worship God! What Jesus taught is the very heart of prophecy.” ^{Rev.19:10(NIrV)} If necessary destroy the “wonder” ie Moses snake – Nu.21:9/2Kings 18:4.

Our faith grows as we walk with God and trust Him. Each experience with God prepares us for the next one (see Moses crossing the Red Sea (Then the LORD spoke to Moses. He said, “Reach your hand out over the sea. The waters will flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.” ^{Ex.14:26}) and Joshua crossing the river Jordan (Speak to the priests who carry the ark of the covenant. Tell them, ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan River, go into the water and stand there.’ ^{Joshua 3:8}))

Expect God to perform Miracles: Expectancy is the Atmosphere for Miracles but Miracles do not mean we are “spiritual” - only that God loves us and is displaying His Glory: That was the first of Jesus' miraculous signs. He did it at Cana in Galilee. Jesus showed his glory by doing it. And his disciples put their faith in him. ^{Jn.2:11} Maturity is about making the right choices instead of the wrong ones: But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. ^{Heb.5:14} We should expect god to do more than we expected: Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. ^{Eph.3:20-21}

Creation shows the power of God, there's glory all around and those who see must stand in awe, for miracles abound.

**I cannot doubt the work of God, it's plain for all to see:
The miracles that he has wrought should lead to Calvary.**

**The love of God! O power divine! 'tis wonderful to see
The miracle of grace performed with-in the heart of me.**

**I believe in miracles, I've seen a soul set free
Miraculous the change in one redeemed through Calvary;
I've seen the lily push its way up through the stubborn sod
I believe in miracles for I believe in God!**

Sunday 18th March Ps.44:1-8 John 11 Mothering Sunday

I believe in the Resurrection of the body and the Life everlasting

I believe in God, the Father almighty... I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord... I believe in the Holy Spirit... I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. The Apostles' Creed

To acknowledge the truth is just plain common sense and not to believe in facts is foolish. Just to acknowledge **God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit** is no great achievement! Neither is it a great accomplishment to acknowledge **the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting**. These are plain facts! But to **BELIEVE** is something different – **BELIEF will make the difference between life and death**. Jesus said: *I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?*^{Jn.11:25-26} This is quoted at most funeral services because the promise of life gives hope and comfort **but this promise of life is conditional – conditional on “believing in Jesus”**.

What did Jesus mean by I am the resurrection and the life?

Simeon prophesied over Jesus: *This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.*^{Lk.2:34} The word *rising* in the Greek is *anastasis* which means **resurrection**. Jesus causes the resurrection of those who believe in Him (even though they die) and the falling of those who do not believe in Him. Jesus was very clear – He is not **a resurrection** but **the resurrection**. He is not **a way** but **the way**: *What I'm about to tell you is true. What if someone does not enter the sheep pen through the gate but climbs in another way? That person is a thief and a robber... I am like a gate for the sheep. All those who ever came before me were thieves and robbers.*^{Jn.:10:1-8(NIrV)} *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*^{Jn.14:6} **Paul was very explicit that a different gospel is a perversion and no gospel at all**: *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!*^{Gal.1:8-9}

The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.

Belief is Faith and faith is a gift from God (a revelation rather than just an agreement with the facts). In other words, faith is more than reading and acknowledging the facts - faith is personally believing God from an inner conviction. When Peter said Jesus was *the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Jesus replied, *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”*^{Matt.16:16-17} T.L.Osborn says: **Do you have confidence that God tells the truth? Do you have confidence that God does what He says He will do? – That's faith!**

If you really believe in something you will talk about: *It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.”*^{Ps.116:10} *With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.*^{2Cor.4:13-14} We talk (and sing) quite a lot about the resurrection of Jesus because this is our Gospel and our hope: *Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.*^{2Tim.2:8} Death is one of the few certainties in life but because Jesus has already died, risen from the dead and is alive forever, we can face the future with certainty and confidence.

Whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Believers (people who are trusting Jesus for their life, who have been born-again into God's Kingdom) have the assurance that their physical death is not the end nor anything to be feared. However, there is a **second death** for those who do not believe in Jesus as the Christ (i.e. believe that Jesus is God's remedy for their separation from God due to sin). This **second death** is final and described as *eternal punishment*,^(Matt.25:41-46) and the fate of *cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshippers, and all liars.*^{Rev.21:8 (NLT)} **For those of us who live by believing in [Jesus], we share in the first resurrection...** *[and] the second death holds no power.*^{Rev.20:6} We are overcomers and *will not be hurt at all by the second death.*^{Rev.2:11} *I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.*^{Jn.5:24} *Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*^{1Jn.5:5}

So

Do you believe this?

Yes, Lord... I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. I believe that you are the One who was to come into the world.^{Jn.10:27} *But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!*
^{Job.19:25-27(NLT)}

Sunday 25th March Ps.45 John 11:45-12:12

How do you show your appreciation of Jesus?

Last week we affirmed our belief in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting because Jesus said: *I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.*^{Jn.11:25(NLT)} But this hope of everlasting life is conditional on our FAITH and is only possible because of Jesus' death: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*^{2Cor.5:21} *He suffered the things we should have suffered. He took on himself the pain that should have been ours. But we thought God was punishing him. We thought God was wounding him and making him suffer. But the servant was pierced because we had sinned. He was crushed because we had done what was evil. He was punished to make us whole again. His wounds have healed us.*^{Is.53:4-5(NIRV)}

Martha, Mary's sister, had already stated publicly who Jesus was: *I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*^{Jn.11:27} Mary had chosen to learn from Jesus: *[She] sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said...* *[Jesus said she] has chosen what is better. And it will not be taken away from her.*^{Lk.10:39-42}

But now it was time for Mary to express her appreciation of Jesus – her worship. The English word “*worship*” comes from the old English “*weorthscipe*” or “*worth-ship*”. When we worship God we are expressing the value we have put on God – what He is worth to us!

When Mary poured the expensive perfume on Jesus, there was no criticism of her from the host (Simon), only from Judas and some of the other disciples!^{Matt.26:8} How different from a couple of years earlier when Simon had *invited Jesus to have dinner with him*^{Lk.7:36} and he had been reprimanded: *[Jesus] said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my*

feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” ^{Lk.7:44-47} It seems that Simon had grown in the faith and that this meal was to show his appreciation to Jesus for healing his leprosy and forgiving his sins.

Mary’s dramatic demonstration of her appreciation was emotional, physical and prophetic. Our appreciation of Jesus’ death (with the resulting forgiveness of sins as well as all the other benefits of peace with God) should also be emotional and physical and prophetic.

Emotional: Mary’s brother had been raised from the dead and it appears that she knew Jesus was about to die so she was obviously going to be emotional. But she was also emotional about her sins being forgiven. ^{Lk.7:47} The 1st and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our mind. ^{Matt.22:37} If we really understood the consequences of sins forgiven we would not just be emotional but ecstatic! No punishment, no rejection, no shame, no (spiritual) death, no domination by sin, no (spiritual) poverty, no domination by sickness, no curse, no guilt, no condemnation and no fear! **Instead we have peace with God** resulting in acceptance, glory, life, righteousness, riches, health and blessing. **What a great exchange!**

Physical: Mary’s display of appreciation was physical – she didn’t just think about Jesus nor did she keep her response “spiritual” – she did something physical. True spirituality is practical. We serve Jesus as we serve others: *Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.* ^{Matt.25:40} *Obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord. Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.* ^{Col.3:22-24(NLT)} *God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ.* ^{1Pet.4:10-11(NLT)}

Prophetic: Mary’s act of worship was in anticipation of Jesus death - it was prophetic and pointed to Jesus imminent sacrificial death. Remember: *the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.* ^{Rev.19:10(NLT)} Jesus said that *when she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.* ^{Matt.26:12} Our worship should always give a clear witness for Jesus and an appreciation of Jesus great sacrifice.

So, How do you show your appreciation of Jesus?

April: My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. ^{Ps.119:50}

Sunday 1st April Ps.46 Church AGM. Guest Speaker: Dave Smethurst

Do you understand the way to peace?

How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes... because you did not accept your opportunity for salvation. ^{Lk.19:42-44(NLT)}

Jesus life was not haphazard or random but every moment was precisely planned and carried out in order that He could be clearly identified as the Christ – God’s answer to the world’s problems. The miracles Jesus performed were a blessing in themselves to those who were healed but each one pointed to His Deity: *But these [miraculous signs] are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life because you belong to him.*^{Jn.20:31(NIrV)}

Jesus was born a king^{Matt.2:2} **and died a king**^{Matt.2:11;37} but He said: “My kingdom is not part of this world. If it were, those who serve me would fight. They would try to keep the Jews from arresting me. My kingdom is from another place.” “So you are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right to say I am a king. In fact, that’s the reason I was born. I came into the world to give witness to the truth. Everyone who is on the side of truth listens to me.”^{Jn.18:36-37(NIrV)} **Jesus and His claims must be believed and received - His kingdom is not imposed on us but has to be accepted.** He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.^{Jn.1:10-13(NLT)}

Horses are for war in the picture language of the Bible: “Job, do you give horses their strength? Do you put flowing manes on their necks? ...They are filled with joy. They charge at their enemies. They laugh at fear. They are not afraid of anything. They do not run away from swords. Many arrows rattle at their sides. Flashing spears and javelins are also there. They are so stirred up that they eat up the ground. They can't stand still when trumpets are blown. When they hear the trumpets they snort, ‘Aha!’ They catch the smells of battle far away. They hear the shouts of commanders and the battle cries.”^{Job39:19-25}

Jesus is seen riding a horse when He releases the fierce wrath of God: *I saw heaven standing open. There in front of me was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True. When he judges or makes war, he is always fair. His eyes are like blazing fire. On his head are many crowns. A name is written on him that only he knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood. His name is The Word of God.*^{Rev.19:11-13(NIrV)}

Donkeys depict peace which is why Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey: “City of Zion, be full of joy! People of Jerusalem, shout! See, your king comes to you. He always does what is right. He has the power to save. He is gentle and riding on a donkey. He is sitting on a donkey's colt. I will take the chariots away from Ephraim. I will remove the war horses from Jerusalem. I will break the bows that are used in battle. Your king will announce peace to the nations. He will rule from ocean to ocean.”^{Zech.9:9-10(NIrV)}

Jesus came to bring us peace and unite us with God: Before you believed in Christ, you were separated from him. You were not considered to be citizens of Israel. You were not included in what the covenants promised. You were without hope and without God in the world. At one time you were far away from God. But now you belong to Christ Jesus. He spilled his blood for you. That has brought you near to God. Christ himself is our peace. He has made Jews and non-Jews into one group of people. He has destroyed the hatred that was like a wall between us. Through his body on the cross, Christ put an end to the law with all its commands and rules. He wanted to create one new group of people out of the two. He wanted to make peace between them. He planned to bring both of them as one body back to God because of the cross. Christ put their hatred to death on that cross. He came and preached peace to you who were far away. He also preached peace to those who were near. Through Christ we both come to the Father by the power of one Holy Spirit.^{Eph.2:12-18(NIrV)}

enjoy the blessings of believing we must choose right from wrong^{Heb.5:14} and to make the right choices we must know what is right. Jesus said: *Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.*” ^{Matt.11:29-30(NLT)}

The Bible is our only reference point for understanding God. Theological books are good but they are someone else’s thoughts on God (and mostly too complicated to understand!) Testimonies are good but they someone else’s experience of God. The Bible is God’s written testimony of Jesus and is more certain than even our own experience: *We also have the prophetic message [of Scripture] as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*^{2Pet.1:19}

The Bible is simple but none of us are as knowledgeable about the important parts as we could be and probably more knowledgeable about the incidental parts than we need to be. So what must we understand – know with certainty, conviction and able to explain to others with credibility?

Know that Jesus is the Christ. *But these [miraculous signs] are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life because you belong to him.*^{Jn.20:31(NIrV)}

Know that Jesus is the Son of God. *At once Saul began to preach in the synagogues. He taught that Jesus is the Son of God... But Saul went on increasing in power, and the Jews in Damascus were not able to give answers to the arguments by which he made it clear that Jesus was the Christ.*^{Acts9:20-22}

Know that Jesus is raised from the dead. To the disciples Jesus resurrection seemed as nonsense^{Lk.24:11} and foolish.^{Lk.24:25} He rebuked them for their *lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe in the resurrection*^{Mk.16:14} and told Thomas to *stop doubting.*^{Jn.20:27} **But it is essential we know and believe that Jesus is alive.** *And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives... And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.*^{Rom.6:4-11(NLT)}

So how do I know I have enough faith? When Jesus disciples asked for more faith, Jesus explained that they didn’t need *lots of faith but living faith* – faith that is linked to obedience: *“We need more faith; tell us how to get it.” “Even if you had faith as small as a mustard seed,” the Lord answered, “you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘May God uproot you and throw you into the sea,’ and it would obey you! ...when you obey me you should say, ‘We are not worthy of praise. We are servants who have simply done our duty.’”*^{Lk.17:5-10(NLT)}

God has done everything for our salvation and wholeness through Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension – now it is up to us to believe (accept) what He has done.

Blessed (truly happy inside) are those who believe.^{Jn.20:29} **Easter is a blessed and happy time** and as we celebrate Jesus resurrection as explained in the Scriptures^{Lk.24:32} we too will find that our *hearts feel strangely warm*^{Lk.24:32(NLT)}

Sunday 15th April Ps.48. Jn.21

What do you do if you are in the doldrums and feel despondent or disheartened?

Although Peter was **Impulsive** (he climbed out of the boat when Jesus walked on the water^{Matt.14:22-23}); **Blessed** (he had the revelation from God that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the Living God^{Matt.16:16f}); **Privileged** (he saw Jesus transfigured and heard God speak from heaven^{Lk.19:28f, 2Pet.1:16f}); **Extreme** (don't just wash my feet – wash my head and feet as well^{Jn.13:9f}); **Loyal** (he said that he would never deny Jesus even if everyone else did^{Mk.14:29}); **Protective** (he cut off Malchus' ear^{Jn.18:10}), he was not so brave as he thought he was. Peter deserted Jesus^{Mk.14:50} and then denied knowing Him^{Jn.18:17;25;27}). He even kept his distance from Jesus when He was dying,^{Lk.23:49} however, Peter was full of remorse and afterwards wept bitterly.^{Lk.22:62}

Imagine how Peter felt after Jesus had died: despondent; dejected; disheartened; downcast; guilt-ridden and a lot more negative emotions too! The Disciples had thought Jesus was the Messiah who was going to redeem Israel,^{Lk.24:21} but now all their hopes were dashed. So when Mary said she had seen Jesus alive, Peter ran to the grave to check it out.^{Jn.20:1f} Although Peter was there when Jesus appeared to the Disciples later that night and also a week later when Thomas' doubts were dispelled,^{Jn.20:24} there is no record that Jesus had any personal or individual conversation with Peter at that time.

Jesus had arranged to meet the Disciples in Galilee^{Mk.16:7} and so they went back home – about 100 miles journey taking at least 4 days to walk! It was here in a familiar and safe setting, together with fellow believers, that Jesus met with Peter and reinstated him. Once restored, the Impulsive, Blessed, Privileged, Extreme, Loyal and Protective Peter was ready to take the lead again.

Here are some important principles for getting back on track when you are in the doldrums and feel despondent, disheartened or downcast:

The adage *If you have a need, sow a seed!* is very relevant when you are facing a crisis, (even a near-crisis!) or feeling despondent, dejected, disheartened, downcast or guilt-ridden. David learnt what to do when his soul was downcast and disturbed within him – he put his hope in God and praised God as his Saviour: *Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Fix my eyes on God - soon I'll be praising again. He puts a smile on my face. He's my God.*^{Ps.42:11; 43:5TM} We should always praise God (*I will thank the LORD at all times. My lips will always praise him.*^{Ps.34:1NIV}) But often we need to do something to help us get to that place.

First: Do something physical, practical and personal. It is very comforting and relaxing to do something physical that you are familiar with. It brings back memories of the “good old days” whilst (hopefully) forgetting the bad times! Peter went fishing – it was his family business so he could do this without having to concentrate or use his brain too much. For you it might be walking on the beach or in the woods; maybe knitting and listening to familiar music; digging the garden; chopping logs; riding a horse (or bicycle).

Second: Keep in fellowship with Believers. Choose your close friends carefully because they will either draw you closer to God or draw you further away from God. Our fellowship is in the Holy Spirit^{2Cor.3:14} and we need each other's encouragement to keep the faith. *Don't become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That's not partnership; that's war. Is light best friends with dark? Does Christ go strolling with the Devil? Do trust and mistrust hold hands? Who would think of setting up pagan*

idols in God's holy Temple? But that is exactly what we are, each of us a temple in whom God lives. God himself put it this way: "I'll live in them, move into them; I'll be their God and they'll be my people. So leave the corruption and compromise; leave it for good," says God. "Don't link up with those who will pollute you. I want you all for myself. I'll be a Father to you; you'll be sons and daughters to me." ^{2Cor.6:14-18TM}

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. But not the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly. For the LORD watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction. ^{Ps.1 NLT}

Remember it is **living faith** that counts **not lots of faith** and **living faith obeys God**: Even if you had faith as small as a mustard seed... it would obey you! ...when you obey me you should say, ...We are servants who have simply done our duty. ^{Lk.17:10(NLT)}

Jesus not only made a way back to God but **He is the Way** ^{Jn.14:6} - **so there is always a way back to God. Peter made it back and so can we.**

Change your life, not just your clothes. Come back to GOD, your God. And here's why: God is kind and merciful. He takes a deep breath, puts up with a lot, this most patient God, extravagant in love, always ready to cancel catastrophe. ^{Joel.2:13}

Sunday 22nd April. Ps.49:1-9. John 21

What do you do after you recover from the doldrums?

The best way to recover from feeling despondent, dejected or disheartened is to put our hope in God and praise Him as our Saviour: *Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Fix my eyes on God - soon I'll be praising again. He puts a smile on my face. He's my God.* ^{Ps.42:11; 43:5TM} But most people who are despondent are unable to do that which is why they are in their predicament in the first place! Actually a lifestyle of praise (telling the truth about God ^{Lk.23:47} and saying good things about Him) will stop us getting disheartened in the first place. **Make a habit of giving thanks to God in every situation** ^{Eph.5:20; Col.3:17} - a habit is something we do automatically and without thinking.

To live happy, cheerful and enheartened lives we must look after our whole person - *spirit, soul and body* ^{1Thes.5:23} (in that order). It is not enough just to **think positive thoughts** - we must **do something positive (and spiritual)**. Sharing our faith ^{Philemon 1:6} (what we believe and know about God) is a sure way of to recover from emotional and spiritual fatigue: *Jesus said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work... Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour."* ^{Jn.4:32-38}

Last week we saw that Peter did something **physical, practical and personal** (for him it was fishing) **with fellow Believers** and Jesus not only met with him but restored him. The next part of the story in John chapter 21 shows us what to do after we have recovered from feeling disheartened.

First, Affirm our love for Jesus: Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”^{Jn.21:15}

Love is not an emotion (but it is emotional!) – **love is a commitment**. Love is the basis for marriage which makes it much more than a civil contract or social convenience. Marriage is a holy covenant where a man and a woman make a sacred commitment before God to respect, love, comfort, honour and keep one another in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, stay faithful to each other for as long as they are both alive. Our love for Jesus is also a **holy covenant** to respect love and honour Jesus and staying faithful to him until death unites us. (**Actually marriage is modelled on Christ’s love for us!**) *So we know that God loves us. We depend on it. God is love. Anyone who leads a life of love shows that he is joined to God. And God is joined to him. So love is made complete among us. We will be bold on the day God judges us. That’s because in this world we love as Jesus did. There is no fear in love. Instead, perfect love drives fear away. Fear has to do with being punished. The one who fears does not have perfect love. We love because he loved us first. Anyone who says he loves God but in fact hates his brother or sister is a liar. He doesn’t love his brother or sister, whom he has seen. So he can’t love God, whom he has not seen. Here is the command God has given us. Anyone who loves God must also love his brothers and sisters.*^{1Jn.4:16-21}

Let’s re-affirm our love for Jesus and so avoid the criticism Jesus made of the Church at Ephesus: *But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don’t repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.*^{Rev.2:4-5NLT}

Second, Care for other Believers: Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”^{Jn.21:15}

Jesus had explained that a good shepherd cares for his sheep and protects them with his life: *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. The hired man ... does not care about the sheep ... I have other sheep that do not belong to this sheep pen. I must bring them in too. They also will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd.*^{Jn.10:11-16} Now Jesus was asking Peter (and also us) to do the same. This caring for others is not just for Pastors but for all of us. We all have a ministry of helping others believe in Jesus and live happy, cheerful and enheartened lives where God’s kingdom and His righteousness is a priority. *But put God’s kingdom first. Do what he wants you to do. Then all of those things will also be given to you.*^{Matt.6:31} Another translation puts it this way: *What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.*TM

Third, Affirm our love for Jesus: Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”^{Jn.21:16}

Fourth, Care for other Believers: Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”^{Jn.21:16}

Fifth, Affirm our love for Jesus: The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”^{Jn.21:17}

Sixth, Care for other Believers: Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”^{Jn.21:17}

As we follow these 6 steps of AFFIRMING OUR LOVE FOR JESUS and CARING FOR OTHERS we will stay happy (blessed) and cheerful and also be useful citizens in God’s kingdom.

Try it – it really does work!

Sunday 29th April Ps.50:1-6 John 13

Jesus now showed them the full extent of His love

Last week we saw that **love is a commitment** not just an emotion. Peter's remorse was that he reneged on his commitment. He said that he loved Jesus but his words were empty – he didn't carry them through to into action. Peter fell asleep 3 times and denied knowing Jesus 3 times which is why 3 times Jesus asked Peter if he really loved him and then told him to do something about it – *Take care of my sheep.*^{Jn.21:16}

At the Last Supper, Jesus *showed them the full extent of His love.*^{Jn.13:1} After Jesus had washed their feet he said *Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do. I'm only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn't give orders to the employer. If you understand what I'm telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.*^{Jn.13:12-17TM}

The world measures success by money and material possessions: *People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*^{1Sam.16:7} *The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight (What society sees and calls monumental, God sees through and calls monstrous.)"*^{Lk.16:14-15} However God measures success by faithfulness *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful (or reliable).*^{1Cor.4:2} *Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own.*^{Lk.12:15NLT}

God's values are often the opposite of this world's values and especially when it comes to who is important: *Jesus called them together. He said, "You know about the rulers of the nations. They hold power over their people. Their high officials order them around. Don't be like that. Instead, anyone who wants to be important among you must be your servant. And anyone who wants to be first must be your slave. "Be like the Son of Man. He did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve others. He came to give his life as the price for setting many people free."*^{Matt.20:25-28(NIrV)} The Disciples were accused of changing the *status quo* when they started living under God's rules: *For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.*^{Acts 6:14} *These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.*^{Acts 17:6(NKJV)}

Often God's values don't "make sense" to the "natural" person but God at His weakest is stronger than man at his strongest: *This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.*^{1Cor.1:25(NLT)} This is very helpful for us because when we make mistakes, God turns it for His glory and our good. *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.*^{Rom.8:28(NIrV)}

Jesus Disciples are His students and we are learning to be like Him: *Students are not better than their teachers. But everyone who is completely trained will be like his teacher.*^{Lk.6:40(NIrV)} *"A student is not better than his teacher. A servant is not better than his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher. And it is enough for the servant to be like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, what can the others who live there expect? "So don't be afraid of your enemies."*^{Matt.10:24-26(NIrV)}

Love is service with a good attitude: *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*^{Jn.15:12;17} *In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set (attitude) as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross.*^{Phil.2:5-8}

The ministry of helping others is as important as any other ministry gift: *You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it. First, God has appointed apostles in the church. Second, he has appointed prophets. Third, he has appointed teachers. Then he has appointed people who do miracles and those who have gifts of healing. He also appointed those able to help others, those able to direct things, and those who can speak in different kinds of languages they had not known before.* ^{1Cor.12:27-28(NIV)}

Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. ^{Rom.12:3-13NLT}

What is the full extent of your love?

May: Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens. Our God is a God who saves; ^{Ps.68:19-20}

Sunday 6th May Ps.51

How well are you dressed?

We usually wear clothes to **protect** us (from immodesty, cold, heat, rain and danger etc.) or **promote** something (such as our identity i.e. uniform or our values i.e. fashion).

Adam was created with a “garment of glory” – the (super)naturalness of God – but when he sinned Adam suddenly discovered that he had lost those clothes and was naked. ^{Gen.3:7} God in His mercy (kindness and compassion) gave Adam and Eve some temporary clothes to wear. These were symbolic of the permanent (eternal) clothes that Jesus was to give us – His Righteousness. *May your priests be clothed with your righteousness; may your faithful people sing for joy.* ^{Ps.132:9} “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.” ^{Zech.3:4} For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness. ^{Is.61:10}

God’s “clothes” are glorious, beautiful, majestic and honourable: O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty. ^{Ps.104:1} and our “spiritual clothes” are the same: *So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* ^{Gal.3:27} These “clothes” are the uniform that identifies us with Jesus. *Fine*

linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)^{Rev.19:8}

But we also have defensive clothes – Armour. *The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So don’t live in darkness. Get rid of your evil deeds. Shed them like dirty clothes. Clothe yourselves with the armour of right living, as those who live in the light. We should be decent and true in everything we do, so that everyone can approve of our behaviour.^{Rom.13:12-13(NLT)} 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.^{1Thes.5:8}*

This armour is to protect our spirit (our God awareness) **and our soul** (our personality, which determines our emotion health) **from the world’s corrupt culture.** *The world is unprincipled. It’s dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn’t fight fair. But we don’t live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren’t for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.^{2Cor.10:3-6(TM)} Put on all of God’s armour so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil.^{Eph.6:10(NLT)} Let’s use each part of this armour to ensure that we aren’t distracted or destroyed: Use every piece of God’s armour to resist the enemy in the time of evil, so that after the battle you will still be standing firm.^{Eph.6:13(NLT)}*

The Belt of Truth: *So stand firm. Put the belt of truth around your waist. The belt holds everything together and also holds the sheath of our sword. We need to know the truth,^{Jn.8:32; 1Jn.2:20} speak the truth^{Eph.4:15} and walk in the truth.^{3Jn.1:4}*

The Breastplate of Righteousness: *Put the armour of godliness on your chest. The breastplate is our right-wise-ness, that is, the knowledge that we are right with God because of Jesus death and resurrection. This “wise-ness” (wisdom is applied knowledge) protects us, especially our heart (our personality and emotions), from everything that opposes God’s values – such as lies, ungodly ideas and non-God desires.*

The Shoes of the Gospel: *For shoes, put on the readiness to preach the Good News of peace with God. A firm footing and foundation is vital. This comes from our readiness to share our faith (what we believe about God). We must be steadfast and unmovable in our faith if we are to live a happy and effective life.*

The Shield of Faith: *In every battle you will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan. We use our shield (faith) to extinguish the “fiery darts” of the devils’ attacks on our mind. Note that we **extinguish** these “missiles” not deflect them!*

The Helmet of Salvation: *Put on salvation as your helmet.* The helmet guards our minds and thought processes. Spiritual battles take place in our minds but we have been given a “saved mind” *For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline (literally a “saved mind”). So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord*^{2Tim.1:7}

The Sword of the Spirit: *And take the sword of the Holy Spirit. The sword is God's word. (Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an indispensable weapon.)* The Sword is the Word of God which is sharp and effective so we must study and obey God's Word. *The word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*^{1Thes.2:13}

Pray in Spirit: *At all times, pray by the power of the Spirit. Pray all kinds of prayers. Be watchful, so that you can pray. Always keep on praying for all of God's people. Pray also for me. Pray that when I open my mouth, the right words will be given to me. Then I can be bold as I tell the mystery of the good news.* Prayer is our communication with the Lord; His plans are always perfect, His support never fails.

So, how well are you dressed? If like Adam you discover that you have no clothes, then it is time to go the “Tailor” and get some! Maybe your clothes don't fit so well – then let Him alter them; if they are dirty – then let Him clean them! Our spiritual clothes, like the Israelites in the wilderness, will not wear out (*Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness. Their clothes did not wear out*^{Neh.9:21}) or become out-dated so they can fit as comfortably, and look as good, as when we first wore them.

Sunday 13th May. Ps.52 John 14

What Friend we have in Jesus.

We were created to be sociable and so friends are important: *And the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him.”*^{Gen.2:18(NLT)} Friends should be loyal^{Prov.17:17} but there are friends and friends! The “*friend who sticks closer than a brother*”^{Prov.18:4} personifies Jesus who really does “*love at all times*”^{Prov.17:17} Jesus was like us - He was human,^{Jn.1:14; Gal.4:4; Heb.2:14} He was tempted;^{Lk.4:1-13; Heb.2:18;4:15} He got hungry,^{Mk.11:12} thirsty^{Jn.19:28} and tired.^{Jn.4:6} Because Jesus was human He can sympathise with us, which makes Him a great Friend.

Yet Jesus was also very different from us – He pre-existed (He lived before He was born,^{Jn.8:48} He was God^{Jn.1:1} (He still is God and will always be God); He never sinned^{2Cor.5:21; 1Pet.2:22} and He is of one essence with God the Father.^{Jn.10:30} Jesus knew who He was and what His purpose was. He said “*I came from the Father and entered the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.*”^{Jn.16:28} It was this clear understanding of His purpose that gave Jesus direction and motivated Him to complete His work^{Jn.4:34; 5:36} and obey His Father: *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!*^{Phil.2:8} “*Father, ...not my will, but yours be done.*”^{Lk.22:42}

Jesus not only obeyed His Father but He was an example for us too: *I have given you an example. You should do as I have done for you. (I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do.)*^{Jn.13:15} *Christ suffered for you. He left you an example. He expects you to follow in his steps.*^{1Pe 2:21} *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*^{1Cor.11:1} Jesus already knew how our minds, emotions, fears and joys affect us because He created us but because Jesus is now human, **we now KNOW that He understands us**. If Jesus could obey God (the Father), then with His help, we too can obey God.

Jesus spent a lot of time with His disciples whom He called “friends” *No one has greater love than the one who gives his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. “I do not call you servants anymore. Servants do not know their master's business. Instead, I have called you friends. I have told you everything I learned from my Father.*^{Jn.15:13-15} Jesus was preparing them for the time He would return to His Father so they would continue to teach about the Kingdom of God as well as live it. God’s Kingdom is a Kingdom of peace: *For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His ever expanding, peaceful government will never end.*^{Is.9:6-7(NLT)} The greeting of “**Peace**” is intended to dispel fear as well as show affection and goodwill: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*^{Jn.14:27(also vs.1)} **We don’t have to be afraid** because **Jesus can be trusted as much as God** (the Father) *Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me.*^{Jn.14:1}

We don’t have to be afraid of God: Because God is holy^{1Pet.1:16-17}, it is only natural to be afraid when we approach God, but in Jesus, God brings us peace: *Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*^{Lk.2:10-11} However we should give God the respect and honour he deserves: *We are receiving a kingdom that can't be shaken. So let us be thankful. Then we can worship God in a way that pleases him. We will worship him with deep respect and wonder. Our “God is like a fire that burns everything up.”*^{Heb.12:28-29(NIrV)}

We don’t have to be afraid of the devil: satan did his worst to Jesus and failed! Now satan is disarmed, defeated and destroyed. *(Jesus) took away the weapons of the powers and authorities. He made a public show of them. He won the battle over them by dying on the cross.*^{Col.2:15(NIrV)} *We know that those who have become part of God's family do not make a practice of sinning, for God's Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot get his hands on them.*^{1Jn.5:18(NLT)} *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*^{Jas.4:7}

We don’t have to be afraid of people: even strong people are weak compared to God. *The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed. ...The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.”*^{Psa.2:1-6} *God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”*^{Heb.13:5-6} *If God is for us, who can be against us? ...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*^{Rom.8:310-37}

Jesus has not abandoned us – He has given us another Friend: *I will ask the Father. And he will give you another Friend to help you and to be with you forever. The Friend is the Spirit of truth.*^{Jn.15:16-17(NIrV)} The word “Friend” is **παράκλησις** (paraklesis) and means “a calling to one's side” (para, “beside,” kaleo, “to call”); hence, either an exhortation, or consolation, comfort. The Holy Spirit (also called the Spirit of Jesus^{Acts 16:7; Phil.1:19}) will help us in the

same way that Jesus helped the Disciples – He will be our Friend to encourage, comfort and counsel us. **If you are afraid then share your fears with Jesus who is a true Friend, Who really understands as well as cares for us.**

Sunday 20th May Ps.52 John 14

How near are you to God?

As the RMS Titanic was sinking, the band played “*Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee*”. This has now become a very emotive hymn and joins the sentimental genre of other hymns like “*Just a closer walk with Thee*” and “*O for a closer walk with God*”. This aspiration to get nearer to God sounds spiritual and good, but as the proverb says “*good is the enemy of the best!*” So what does God’s Word say about becoming more spiritual? The basic facts of Christianity are: **God is Spirit,**^{Jn.4:24} **we are flesh** (human) and *humans can reproduce only human life.*^{Jn.3:6(NLT)} **God became flesh** (human)^{Jn.1:14} **which enabled us to become God’s children:** *But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.*^{Jn.1:12(NLT)} When we became Christians we were *born from above ...and of the Spirit.*^{Jn.3:3-7} We are now united with God *but anyone who is joined to the Lord becomes one with him in spirit,*^{1Cor.6:17(NIrV)} *He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.*^{2Pet.1:7}

Being spiritual is not the result of religious activity but the essence of our new nature given to us at conversion. Adam was God’s son^{Lk.3:38} but lost that position when he sinned and so all his descendants were also alienated from God: *For I was born a sinner - yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.*^{Ps.51:5(NLT)} *Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.*^{Rom.5:18-19(NLT)} We are righteous because righteousness is now our nature not because we are perfect. *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*^{2Cor.5:21} *I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.*^{Phil.3:12(NLT)}

You cannot get more “spiritual” than having God make His home in you!^{Jn.14:23}

Maturity is not even about being “*righteous,*” “*spiritual*” or even having a “*spiritual experience*” for sadly history shows the opposite. Moses had face to face encounters with God yet refused to obey Him;^{Exodus 3} Gideon had a personal encounter with God yet did not believe Him;^{Judges 6} Solomon had a personal encounter with God^{1King 3} yet lived a profligate life, even though he came back to God before he died (Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes as a reflection on his past life).

Maturity is about training ourselves to make the right choices: *Solid food is for those who are mature, who have trained themselves to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right.*^{Heb.5:14(NLT)} *If we keep practising, what we practise becomes our second nature, then in a crisis and in the details of life we shall find that not only will the grace of God stand by us, but also our own nature. Whereas if we refuse to practise, it is not God’s grace but our own nature that fails when the crisis comes, because we have not been practising in actual life.*^{Facing Reality by Oswald Chambers}

Grapes and Vines are often used in the Bible as an picture of God's people: Joseph was a fruitful vine;^{Gen.49:22} the Israelites brought back a very large cluster of grapes from Eschol;^{Nu13:23} Israel is described a vineyard.^{Ps.80; Is.5; Matt.21:33 etc.} Wine is synonymous with the New Covenant.^{Joel 2:19f; Amos 9:13; Hag.1:11; Lk.5:37;22:17-20etc.} Grapes only grow on the vine's new growth and so all last year's branches are cut right back to the vine. In John 15, Jesus explained that we are like branches on a grape-vine and the Father is the Gardener who wants us to produce fruit. All fruit has the DNA of the parent plant and the potential of similar life. Now we are God's children, **we too have the DNA of CHRIST and the potential to grow into mature CHRIST-ians.** BUT yester-year's (or yesterday's) fruit is no sign of maturity – only the fruit that we are bearing **TODAY** counts! The only way to bear fruit is for God to prune us and to remain in Jesus: *My Father is the gardener ...He trims every branch that does bear fruit. Then it will bear even more fruit ...Remain joined to me, and I will remain joined to you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain joined to the vine. In the same way, you can't bear fruit unless you remain joined to me.* ^{Jn.15:1-4(NIrV)}

Jesus went on to explain that to remain in Him means to remain in His love – not His doctrine or even the Church: *Just as the Father has loved me, I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. In the same way, I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy will be in you. I also want your joy to be complete.* ^{Jn.15:9-11(NIrV)}

The greatest characteristic of Jesus is His LOVE. This ingredient is what distinguishes God's Kingdom from any other kingdom. *God is love*^{1Jn.4:16} and because God created us in His image,^{Gen.1:27} love is what everyone yearns for. Unfortunately people often mistake emotion for love and usually look for it in the wrong place. *Love comes from God ...But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love ...his is real love - not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins ...No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us ...God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect.* ^{1Jn.4:7-17(NLT)}

So don't try to be more "spiritual" or "get closer to God". **Rather, remain in His love and get into a habit of making the right choices.** *Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding.*^{Heb.6:1} *The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity. And the seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God's word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest.*^{Matt.8:14-15(NLT)}

June: Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
^{Phil.4:6}

July: And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ^{Phil.4:7}

August: Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” ^{Ps.91:1-2}

September: Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
^{Romans 12:12}

October: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ^{John 14:1}

November: And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. ^{Col.3:17}

December: My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. ^{Luke 1:46-47}